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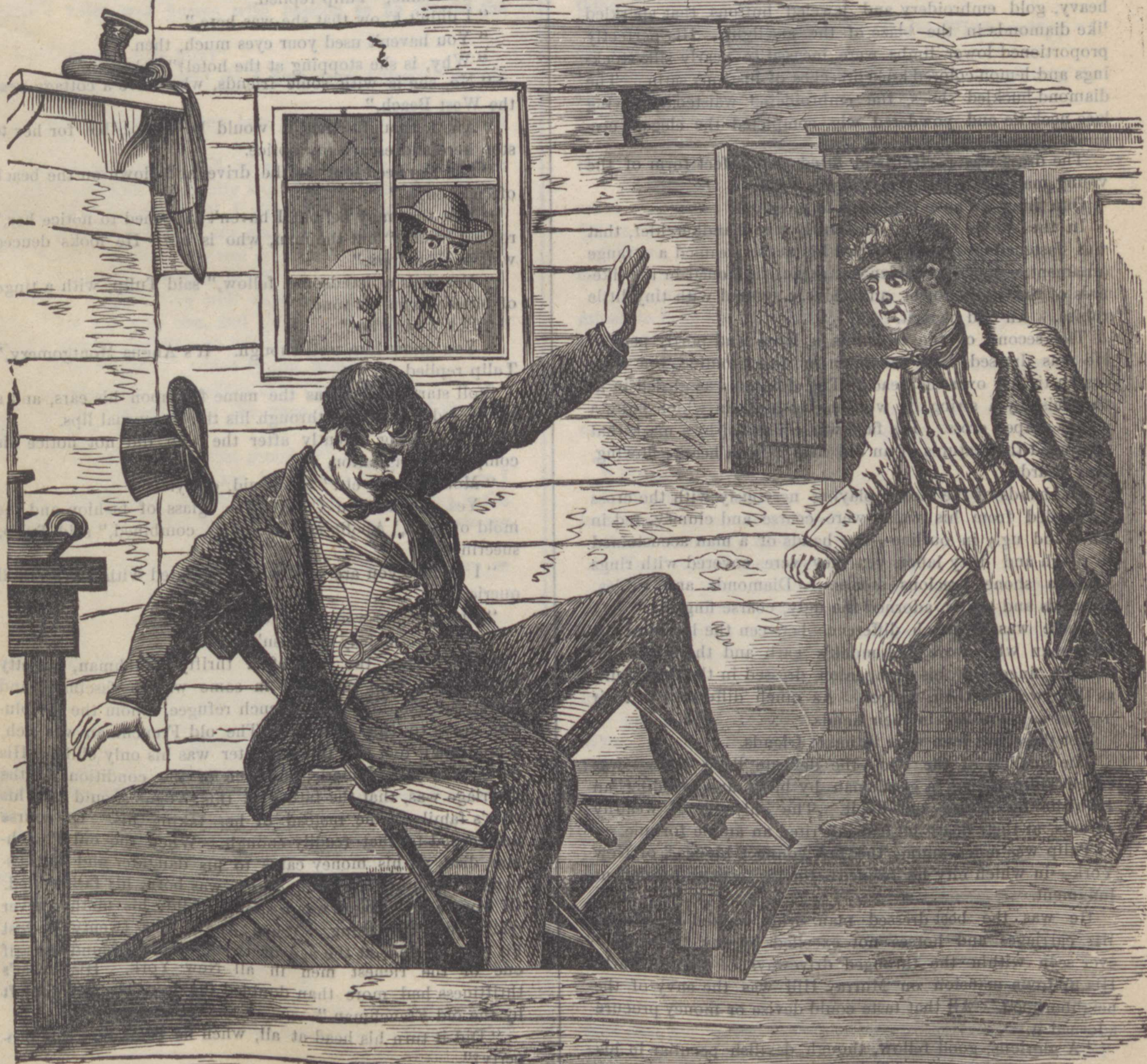
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HUNTED DOWN; or, The League of Three.

BY ALBERT W. AIKEN,

AUTHOR OF "THE SPOTTER DETECTIVE," "THE NEW YORK 'SHARP'," "OVERLAND KIT," "ROCKY MOUNTAIN BOB," ETC., ETC.



SUDDENLY THE FLOOR UNDER MONTGOMERY GAVE WAY. HE WAS ENTRAPPED.

HUNTED DOWN; OR, THE LEAGUE OF THREE.

BY ALBERT W. AIKEN,
AUTHOR OF "THE SPOTTER DETECTIVE," "OVERLAND KIT,"
"THE NEW YORK 'SHARP,'" "INJUN DICK," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE MASQUERADE-BALL.

THE large ball-room of the Ocean House at Newport, the far-famed summer-resort, was filled almost to suffocation by a gay and brilliant throng.

It was the last masquerade of the season—the crowning triumph of mirth's brilliant reign.

On the morrow the crowd of laughing maskers would depart for their city homes.

The crash of the music mingled with the joyous notes of the hilarious voices, with the rustle of the motley masquerading garments, and the light tread of the tripping feet.

In a corner of the room stood two of the masqueraders in close conversation. The two were of the sterner sex. Like all within the room, they were in fanciful costumes, which, with the masks they wore over their faces, completely concealed their identity.

The first of the two, who stood nearest to the door that gave entrance to the ball-room, was small in stature; a dainty little fellow; in form, an Apollo in miniature. He was dressed in a rich court suit, of the style worn by the butterfly courtiers of Louis the XIV of France. The coat was of the finest silk-velvet, a rich wine in color, and adorned with heavy, gold embroidery and jeweled buttons, that sparkled like diamonds in the blaze of the gas-light. His perfectly proportioned lower limbs were incased in pearly silk stockings and lemon-colored knee-breeches of lustrous satin. The diamond-buckled shoes, the embroidered waistcoat, flowing lace neck-tie and powdered wig, completed the elegant costume.

The dress was perfect and fitted the perfect form of the young man like a kid-glove fits the hand.

One thing we have neglected to mention.

In the snowy folds of the costly lace handkerchief, that was fastened carelessly around his neck, gleamed a strange ornament. It was a golden breastpin, fashioned in the likeness of the tulip flower, and thickly spotted with tiny little rubies. An odd conceit.

The second of the two was a large and portly person. He was dressed as a monk, in a gray domino, the cowl drawn tightly over the head. The domino was girded in at the waist by a string of wooden beads, from which hung a rudely-shaped cross. His face was concealed by a mask that portrayed the features of an old man with a heavy, flowing, gray beard.

The hands of the monk, playing nervously with the cross suspended from his waist, were coarse and clumsy, red in color and ugly in outline—the hands of a man accustomed to rough and dirty labor, yet they were covered with rings wherein shone precious stones. Diamonds and rubies, emeralds and pearls, adorned the ugly, coarse fingers.

There was as much difference between the hands of the large man who wore the monk's garb and the white and delicate fingers of his companion, dressed in the court suit, as their was in their figures. As much difference in their natures as there was in their hands.

Yet these two men were intimate friends.

The smallest of the two—the delicate little fellow—was called Tulip Roche; a gentleman by birth and breeding, an exquisite by nature and habit. The only son of wealthy parents, at their death he had inherited an ample fortune.

Tulip was noted among the fast young "bloods" of New York—in which city he resided—for his taste and excellent judgment.

He was the best-dressed man who walked Broadway. His carriages and horses not excelled by any "turnout" ever seen within the thronged driveways of Central Park. His up-town mansion on Murray Hill was the envy of the neighborhood. All that taste could devise or money procure adorned it.

"A glorious, good fellow, though devilish peculiar in his," said the World, of Tulip Roche.

His companion, the stout man dressed as a monk, was Herman Stoll—a German by birth, or as his enemies

said, bluntly, a German Jew; as though a man's birth and parentage could be flung in his face as a disgrace.

Was the taunt of his foes truth or not, Herman Stoll indignantly denied that Jewish blood flowed in his veins, although, after one look into his face—one quick glance at the high cheek-bones, curved nose, piercing black eyes, and short, crispy, curling hair—any one gifted with the skill of "reading faces," would surely have concluded that Herman Stoll lied when he declared that no blood of the scattered nation, who can not claim a country of their own, ran in his veins.

Herman Stoll was a broker by occupation, doing business in Wall street, and reputed to be a sharp, far-seeing man, and one well gifted with this world's golden treasures.

If the broker was not a wealthy man he acted like one, and spent money as freely as though it were as easily got as water.

A great patron of the "turf" was Herman; a bright and shining light among the frequenters of Jerome Park, and like places. His face, too, was well known to the attaches of the opera-house and the leading theaters.

But to the conversation of the two.

"Who is that?" asked Stoll, as a tall, elegant figure wearing the sable robes of "Hamlet," and having on his arm a blonde beauty attired in the bluish sheen of "Morning," passed by them.

"Which one—the man or the woman?" asked Tulip.

"Well, both?" replied his friend.

"To commence with the lady first, she is called Frances Chauncy—"

"What! the Lexington avenue belle?" interrupted Stoll.

"The same," Tulip replied.

"I didn't know that she was here."

"You haven't used your eyes much, then."

"Why, is she stopping at the hotel?" asked Stoll.

"No, she is with some friends, who have a cottage near the West Beach."

"Ah, I thought that it would be impossible for her to stop here and escape my notice."

"She has been out on the drive and down on the beach often enough."

"Yes, that may be, but I haven't happened to notice her," replied Stoll; "but the man, who is he? He looks deuced well in that dress."

"Yes, he's a handsome fellow," said Tulip, with a tinge of bitterness in his tone.

"But who is he?"

"You know him well enough. It's Angus Montgomery," Tulip replied.

Stoll started a little as the name fell upon his ears, and a smothered curse came through his thick, sensual lips.

Tulip, gazing intently after the two, did not notice his companion's agitation.

"Montgomery, eh?" Stoll said, dryly.

"Yes, the modern Cræsus, the 'glass of fashion and the mold of form,' Apollo and Hercules, combined," said Tulip, sneeringly.

"I believe you are very well acquainted with him?" Stoll queried.

"Oh, yes! we were boys together."

"He's enormously rich, isn't he?"

"Yes. He's the son of a thrifty Scotchman, a petty store-keeper, who managed in some way to fascinate and marry the daughter of a French refugee, whom the Revolution drove to this country. The old Frenchman was rich, a nobleman, too, and this daughter was his only child. His name was Montgomerie, and one of the conditions of the marriage was, that the father of this Angus should take his wife's family name instead of her taking his. Of course he acceded to that readily enough. When the old Frenchman died, all his money came to his daughter and her husband. A short time after Angus was born, his father died. Of course this Angus was a spoiled child; his mother never denied him any thing. When Angus was twenty, he lost his mother, and, at the age of twenty-one, he found himself one of the richest men in all New York. His father's thriftiness had more than doubled the immense fortune left by the old Frenchman."

"Did it turn his head at all, when he came into this property?"

"No, no!" Tulip replied, with a laugh. "He accepted it as a matter of course. He had not been brought to know the want of money."

"That is, he is a man born with a silver spoon in his mouth, as the saying is," Stoll said.

"Yes, only his spoon was a gold one."

"He knows how to take care of his money, too, I'm told."

"Yes, he's no fool."

"And this Miss Chauncy, is he engaged to her?"

Stoll, gazing after the handsome couple, did not notice the thrill of pain that shook Tulip's light form as the carelessly put question fell upon his ear.

"I—I really can not say," Tulip answered, slowly.

"Well, if one can judge by their manner toward each other, at any rate, they are lovers."

"Miss Chauncy is said to be something of a coquette."

"A coquette?"

"Yes, I believe it is so reported," Tulip replied.

"It would be just his luck to get her," said Stoll, coarsely. "These money-bags always marry each other."

"Well, he may get her, and then he may not," Tulip observed, dryly.

Something in the tone of Tulip's voice attracted Stoll's attention. He turned from the masqueraders to his companion.

"Hallo! I fancy that—to use the popular saying—'I smell a mice.' Did you ever care for Miss Chauncy?"

Tulip winced at the question.

"Oh, don't be afraid to answer," Stoll continued. "If my suspicion is true, we are both in the same boat."

"What do you mean?" Tulip demanded.

"Why, that both of us have cause to hate this Angus Montgomery."

Tulip looked with wondering eyes upon Stoll. The broker's voice was hoarse with passion as he uttered the words.

"And do you hate him?"

"No man in this world do I hate more bitterly," replied Stoll, angrily.

"And why so? Do you love this beautiful girl, Frances Chauncy?"

"Love!" exclaimed Stoll, in scorn, "love a woman, that strange compound of vanity and deceit? Oh, no! I like women well enough, until I tire of them, which is very soon. But, as to hating any man on account of a woman—Well, when I do that, they can send me to a lunatic asylum."

"Why then do you hate him?"

"Tulip, I can't very well explain," said Stoll, in confusion; "but I do hate him, and I'd go a thousand miles and spend a thousand dollars to be revenged upon him."

"And so would I!" added Roche, firmly.

"I guessed right then about Miss Chauncy?"

"Yes, two months ago she gave me her word that she would be my wife."

"And she has broken that promise?"

"She has not yet told me, but I feel sure, from what I have seen and heard, that she has. This Montgomery is the cause of it, and I'll be even with him, even if it costs me my life!"

Little did Montgomery know of the foes that were so near him.

CHAPTER II.

THE ORACLE'S WARNING.

"HAMLET" and "Morning," represented by Mr. Angus Montgomery and Miss Frances Chauncy, promenaded down the room together.

As Tulip Roche had guessed—as all the fashionable world, who were making Newport their summer home had said—the twain were lovers.

Chatting together, saying those "nothings," that are so sweet to lovers' ears, they made their way through the ever-changing groups of masqueraders.

Suddenly the two were confronted by a figure dressed all in white.

The form was that of a woman arrayed in a domino of white silk. A mask of the same hue and material concealed her face.

The hood of the domino being tightly drawn over her head, met the mask in front, so that no stray lock of hair could be seen.

The little hands of the woman were covered by white

kid gloves. The tiny feet that peeped out from under the folds of the domino were incased in white boots.

All was white.

But through the snowy mask shone a pair of large, jet-black eyes, eyes full of life and fire.

The two halted, in astonishment, when they were confronted by the strange, white figure.

"Black and white are the hues of mourning, the emblems of grief; they do not look well together," said the figure in white, in a low voice, evidently disguised.

Montgomery did not like the words of the speaker. She plainly referred to his sable dress of Hamlet and the white robes representing "Morning," worn by Miss Chauncy.

"Do you see the color of my dress?"

"Yes."

"I am called THE WHITE WITCH!"

"The White Witch! Indeed?"

"Yes, I can tell of the past—"

"That is not difficult; history does the same."

"Speak also of the present."

"The daily newspaper is your rival there."

"And sometimes reveal the future," said the disguised figure, solemnly.

"Ah, now you are stating something wonderful," said Montgomery, laughing. He fancied that this extraordinary commencement was but the prelude to one of the usual masquerading jokes. "I suppose that if I cross your palm with silver, you will tell me all about my future life. Tell me whom I shall marry—how many times, and in fact, all the particulars?"

"Oh, I don't like fortune-tellers," said Miss Chauncy, petulantly, "they always say such horrid, disagreeable things."

"Do not fear, lady," said the White Witch, softly; "I can not tell your fortune."

"Only mine, then, eh?" said Montgomery, beginning to enjoy the joke.

"Yes, only yours."

"You see how highly favored I am by fortune!" exclaimed the young man, laughing, to his companion.

"Perhaps you will not think that you are highly favored when you hear the fate that is in store for you," said the White Witch, slowly and sadly.

"There, I knew it would be something disagreeable!" exclaimed the blonde beauty, in a tone of conviction.

"You have excited my curiosity, and now I am determined to hear what my fate is to be—that is, if you can tell me," said the young man, gayly.

"Within one month at most you will not doubt my power," replied the mysterious figure.

"That's right, pitch it strong, as my old music-master used to say," said Montgomery, laughing.

"You will follow me, then?"

"Where?"

"Only to the balcony. What I have to say to you must be spoken to your ears alone."

"Is it absolutely necessary?"

"Yes," replied the seeress, decidedly.

"Have I your permission to leave you for a few moments?" Montgomery asked, speaking to the fair girl upon his arm. "I confess that this mysterious messenger from the other world has excited my curiosity."

"Certainly," replied the lady, withdrawing her arm from his.

"But wait a moment!" cried Montgomery, to the White Witch, who had turned to lead the way to the balcony, "are you sure that you know who I am?"

"Quite," responded the masked figure, promptly; "you are Mr. Angus Montgomery, and your companion is Miss Frances Chauncy."

"She does know us," said Montgomery, in the young girl's ear. "Can you guess who she is?"

"No, I do not think that I have ever heard her voice before," said the blonde beauty, slowly.

"I confess that it puzzles me, for her voice is not familiar to me either," Montgomery said, thoughtfully.

"I am waiting," said the clear tones of the oracle.

"A thousand pardons," cried Montgomery, quickly; "excuse me, please, for a few moments," he said, to Frances, with a bow, then through the group of maskers he followed the mysterious figure, dressed all in white, to the balcony.

The clear rays of the summer moon shone down upon the balcony almost as light as day.

Montgomery's curiosity had been strangely excited by the

mysterious announcement made by the "White Witch," as she had termed herself, and he was determined to carry out the joke, for such he considered it.

The balcony was almost deserted. A few couples only strolled up and down, enjoying the cool ocean breeze.

The White Witch led the way to a remote corner of the broad plaza, and there she halted.

Montgomery had followed her without hesitation.

"All things are fitting for a mystic disclosure," said the young man, gayly, as they halted. "It is the 'witching hour when churchyards yawn'—the moonbeams are shining full upon us, and I, with becoming gravity, wait to hear my fate."

"Would to heaven, Angus Montgomery, that other lips than mine could tell you of that fate," said the mysterious figure, in low and mournful tones.

In spite of himself, Montgomery was impressed by the tone in which she spoke.

For a moment the young man looked at the white figure before him in silent amazement, then at last he said:

"I am waiting to hear my fate."

"And you have no fear?"

"No, why should I fear?"

"Your past life has been all sunshine?"

"Yes."

"But of the future—"

"Well, what of the future?"

"The clouds of misfortune gather heavy around you!"

"So that the sunshine through the clouds in the end, what care I?" said Montgomery, firmly.

"At present you are happy?"

"Yes."

"And why are you happy?" asked the strange figure, earnestly.

"That is, possibly, a difficult question to answer."

"I will answer it for you."

"Do."

"In the first place you have plenty of money."

"That's the key-note to nearly all human hearts," said Montgomery, scornfully. "You are right to put money first."

"You have warm and devoted friends."

"Yes."

"One friend particularly, whom you love as a brother—Tulip Roche."

"Again you are right. Tulip is like a brother to me, and I think that—brother-like—he would peril his life to serve me," Montgomery said, quickly.

"Money and friendship—what else is wanting to complete your happiness?" asked the White Witch, significantly.

"Well, if you can not tell, you are not half a witch!" exclaimed the young man.

"Love."

"That is the answer."

"And you find that love in the heart of Frances Chauncy?"

"Now you are touching upon a delicate subject," said Montgomery, gravely. "Speak as you like about my money and my friends, but I would prefer that you should not mention Miss Chauncy. The relation that I bear in regard to that lady, is such that I can not permit her name to be made the subject of a masquerading jest."

"You will find that the jest is bitter, earnest truth, before many days are over," replied the masked woman, in solemn tones.

"I am really losing patience!" exclaimed Montgomery; "if you have aught to say to me, please say it at once, and let me return to the ball-room."

"I am speaking of the present that I may speak of the future. You are rich, beloved, happy?" questioned the sibyl.

"Yes."

"Now, listen to my words. Your riches will take to themselves wings and fly away; the friend that you have taken to your breast and cherished like a brother, will turn upon and sting you; the woman that you love will prove false to you. Wealth, friendship, love, all will desert you."

"What!" cried the young man, indignantly, and a frown was upon the brow that the mask hid.

"Time will prove my words to be truth," said the White Witch, in a clear, firm voice.

"Lady, you are going altogether too far," and a trace of anger was in Montgomery's voice as he spoke; "too far even for a masquerade jest. I would stake my life upon the faith of the woman I love."

"Oh, matchless folly!" cried the mysterious woman, in a

tone of scorn. "Do you not know that all women are not angels—that some are as unstable as water, as fickle and as changeable as the wind?"

"And who are you that tell me this?" demanded Montgomery, astonished at her words and manner.

"I have already told you I am THE WHITE WITCH. Whether I am your good genius or your evil angel, time alone will tell. I may be friend or I may be foe; but mark my words, within one month, or one year, you will lose wealth, friends and love. All will desert you. Frances Chauncy loves your money and your station; not you. When the blows fall thick and heavy upon your head, remember the words of the White Witch."

Then she glided from the balcony, and entered the ball-room. For a moment Montgomery paused in astonishment, then followed her; but she had disappeared.

CHAPTER III.

FORMING THE LEAGUE.

VAINLY Montgomery searched amid the groups that crowded the ball-room; the strange woman attired all in white was not to be found.

Montgomery was puzzled.

"This may be a joke," he muttered, to himself, "but it is a very strange one."

A hand laid upon his shoulder interrupted the young man's meditations.

Turning, Montgomery saw at his side a tall figure dressed in the loose, white garb of a Pierrot—the French clown.

"Well, Montgomery, how are you enjoying yourself?" said a genial voice, coming from beneath the long, pointed nose of the white mask that the new-comer wore.

By the voice, Montgomery recognized who it was that addressed him.

"Is that you, O'Connel?" he asked.

"Yes," replied the other, removing his mask, and displaying the face of a man of thirty. The face was a bold and handsome one; regular in outline, clear red-and-white in color; lit up by a pair of full blue eyes; eyes so darkly blue that, at a few paces off, they looked like black. Crispy curls of a rich golden hue clustered around the shapely head. The broad, expansive forehead, and the firm-set, resolute mouth, showed both brain and will. There was a lurking devil in the large blue eyes that told of man's fiery passions.

Lionel O'Connel—so the stranger in white was called—was no common man. An Irishman by birth, he had but lately come to the land that offers a home to the oppressed of every nation.

By profession, O'Connel was a writer, and was attached to the "staff" of a justly-celebrated daily newspaper.

The young Irishman wielded a brilliant and vigorous pen, and was already spoken of as one of the "rising men" of the "Fourth Estate," as the mighty men of the "Press-gang" are termed.

There was a mystery, too, about O'Connel that served to attract attention to him. Of course every one was aware that his salary could not be large—for, as a general rule, there is more fame than money in the newspaper world—yet, somehow, he contrived to live in most excellent style. Always possessed of ample means, he spent his money with a lavish hand. None of the young "bloods" with whom he associated—for O'Connel had contrived to introduce himself into the first circles in New York—were more princely in their expenditures.

When questioned sometimes by some curious friend as to how he could afford to be so extravagant, he would laugh carelessly, and vaguely speak of his family estates across the water. And so at last it came to be currently believed that he was the heir to some vast property in Ireland, and that his present way of life was merely a whim, such as is often indulged in by men who are independent of the world.

So Lionel O'Connel, though a worker for his bread in the great hive of life known as New York city, was well received by men of breeding and of wealth, who scorned to sully their dainty fingers with the stains of toil.

O'Connel was a man who possessed wondrous powers of fascination. Men were attracted to him by some subtle instinct that they could neither understand nor resist. Young and beautiful women, the belles of the fashionable world,

bestowed their sweetest smiles upon the dashing young Irishman. Yet he did not seem conscious of this power that he possessed, and often spoke with wonder of the ease with which he made friends.

"A thorough good fellow—no man's enemy." Such was the opinion of the world.

"Yes," O'Connel replied to Montgomery's speech. "I'm enjoying myself very well, but I'm a little puzzled just now."

"At what?" O'Connel asked.

"Listen and I'll tell you. I suppose that it's only a joke, but I don't like such jokes. As I was promenading with a lady a few minutes ago, I was accosted by a woman dressed all in white, who, in reply to my question, said she was called the White Witch. She asked for a few minutes' conversation with me alone. I followed her out on the balcony, and there she predicted that all sorts of misfortunes were going to come down thick and heavy upon my head. Mind you, this was all said in sober earnest; there didn't seem to be the least bit of a joke about it. Then she returned to the ball-room. I followed the moment after, but she has disappeared as suddenly as she appeared, and I can not find any trace of her."

"What were the evils with which she threatened you?" asked O'Connel, an earnest look in his eyes despite his efforts to appear unconcerned.

"The loss of wealth, of friends, and the woman I love."

O'Connel could not repress a slight start when Montgomery's words fell upon his ears.

"I see that you, too, are astonished," continued Montgomery.

"Yes, naturally so," replied the young Irishman, carelessly. "Did you not recognize this person?"

"No; she is, I think, a stranger to me. The voice was not familiar."

"Well, it is odd, to say the least," said O'Connel, thoughtfully.

"Yes; I'd give something to find out who it is."

"Oh, it's only a joke."

"Yes, but I don't like such jokes," Montgomery said, seriously. And as he spoke, he caught sight of the blonde beauty dressed as "Morning" coming toward him.

"Will you excuse me?" he said to O'Connel, hastily.

"I see that I am wanted."

Then Montgomery joined Miss Chauncy, and drawing her arm in his, was soon lost to the eyes of O'Connel in the crowd.

Miss Chauncy was quite eager to know what the strange white mask had said to her lover, but Montgomery evaded the question. He did not tell the blonde beauty of the strange prediction of the White Witch.

After Montgomery left him, O'Connel remained motionless for a few moments, absorbed in thought. It was evident that his musings were not pleasant ones, for a shadow was on his face.

"I can not understand it," he muttered, at length. "The words of the White Witch are strange to Montgomery, but doubly so to me, that am behind the curtain. It is merely a masquerading joke, without meaning, or has some unknown power guessed the secret thoughts—not even yet translated into words—that are swelling in my brain? It must be a coincidence. How could any one guess my purpose? I have not yet begun to lay the train by which the mine is to be exploded. I must to work, though, at once. Now for my tools; the hands who are to do the work that my brain plans."

Then his eyes fell upon two masqueraders standing together near the wall and apart from the dancers.

"There they are," he said, and a smile came over his face. "The two who in serving their ends, serve mine. We three, separate, are powerless; together, with my head to guide, we are a host."

O'Connel replaced his mask and walked slowly over to where the two stood that he had noticed.

They were Tulip Roche and Herman Stoll.

The two, busy in conversation, did not notice the approach of O'Connel.

Just as O'Connel came up, Montgomery and Miss Chauncy, arm in arm, chatting gayly together, walked past.

"There they go again," said Stoll, and a muttered curse against Montgomery was smothered by the mask that covered his lips.

"A pretty couple," said O'Connel, in his easy way, coming quite close to the two.

"Hallo, Con!" exclaimed Stoll, in his coarse way. He had recognized the voice of the Irishman.

"I say that they are a very pretty couple," repeated O'Connel.

"Who?" said Stoll.

"Why, the two that you just referred to, Mr. Angus Montgomery and Miss Frances Chauncy. Don't you agree with me? If you don't, Stoll, I am sure that Tulip here will. Every one knows how like brothers he and Angus are, and of course, brother-like, he thinks the world of Miss Chauncy. I suppose you will act as Angus' best man, eh, Tulip?"

Had the mask been torn, suddenly, from the face of Tulip Roche, the action would have revealed features white with rage.

But Tulip's secret was hid by the mask, so he held his place and said nothing.

"Montgomery is a lucky fellow, isn't he?" continued O'Connel. "Rich as an Astor, handsome as a picture, and loved by an angel in the guise of this blonde beauty, what else is wanting to complete his happiness?"

"You speak of the fellow as if he were a god," said Stoll, loweringly.

"I have only spoken truth, given one side of the picture. Told of Angus Montgomery, rich and beloved. I have not yet said any thing about his three enemies, now standing in this ball-room, who will pull him down from his pinnacle of triumph, give his money to the winds and tear from him the love of the woman that he fondly fancies is all his own."

"Why, what do you mean?" asked Stoll, in astonishment; and Tulip's eyes, too, asked the question.

"Exactly what I say," replied O'Connel, coolly. "That Angus Montgomery has three deadly enemies standing almost within ear-shot of him. Three men who will rob him of every thing that he holds dear in this world."

Tulip and Stoll looked at each other in wonder.

For a moment there was silence. The two seemed to be considering the strange words of O'Connel.

"Montgomery has three enemies?" said Stoll.

"Yes," replied O'Connel.

"Who are they?"

"The first is called Tulip Roche; the second, Herman Stoll, and the third, Lionel O'Connel."

The two men started as though they had received an electric shock when the Irishman pronounced their names.

"What the deuce do you mean, Con?" asked Stoll, hastily. "I am not aware that I am an enemy of Mr. Montgomery."

"Nor I," said Tulip, slowly.

"Gentlemen, let us lay our cards upon the table; it is better that we should see each other's hand, for we must play partners and not against each other in this game," said O'Connel, coolly. "I, for one, hate this Angus Montgomery; you hate him, too, Stoll, and you, too, Tulip, although you may deny it."

"Why should I hate him?" asked Stoll, bluntly.

"Because he has beaten you with your own weapons and at your own game. He now holds a rod of terror over your head. You are to see him to-night and compromise the matter if possible."

Stoll hung his head, abashed. O'Connel had spoken but the truth.

"And now, you, Tulip; you hate him because he has won the love of Frances Chauncy from you. She gave you her word that she would become your wife; she has broken that word. And I hate this man because I hate him; a woman's reason. I propose to you, gentlemen, a league of three, the object of which shall be to ruin this Montgomery. You, Stoll, shall have the money back that this man is going to wring from you; Tulip, you shall have Frances Chauncy, and I will have nothing but revenge; that will content me. What say you, gentlemen? Alone, we are powerless to injure him; united we will humble this Angus Montgomery even to the dust. Come, decide. Shall we three fight this one man?"

CHAPTER IV.

WEAVING THE WEB.

TULIP and Stoll looked at O'Connel in astonishment, but replied not to his plainly put question.

"Come, gentlemen, your answer?" said O'Connel, im-

patiently, finding that they did not speak. "Do you know I fancy that if Montgomery had the same cause for revenge against you that you have against him, and a kind friend—like myself—were to place in his hands the weapons of vengeance that I offer you, he would not hesitate long about accepting, cold, 'canny' Scotchman as he is, though he was born in America and the blood of two nations runs in his veins."

"I, for my part, can not answer at present," said Tulip, with considerable hesitation.

"Nor I," muttered Stoll.

"You require time?"

"Yes," both answered, in a breath.

"To think it over, eh?"

"Yes," again replied Tulip, and Stoll nodded assent.

"No, gentlemen, do not try to deceive me. I am not worthy to be your chief, if I could be deceived so easily."

Tulip and Stoll looked at each other. The masks upon their faces hid a strange expression.

O'Connel noticed the look.

"I say chief, because in this League of Three I am to be the chief. It was my brain that conceived the idea of the league. Alone—each acting for himself—we are powerless against our common enemy. Like Napoleon, he would beat us in 'detail.' But leagued together—a brotherhood of three, each for all, and all for one, like the Three Musketeers of Dumas—we can pull him down from his proud position in the world and trample him beneath our feet," said the Irishman, calmly and smoothly.

Tulip and Stoll listened in amazement. They felt the force of O'Connel's words.

"And now, gentlemen, I'll tell you why you require time and can not answer my question at once," continued the Irishman. "In the first place, you, Stoll, have made up your mind to see Montgomery and try—if possible—to crawl out of the extremely awkward position in which your own acts have placed you."

Stoll started with astonishment. O'Connel had guessed his very thought.

"And you, Tulip," continued O'Connel, who did not seem to notice the evident embarrassment of the stout broker, though it was evident from the quick, exulting flash of his eye that Stoll's confusion had not been unobserved by him, "you hesitate to reply, now, because you doubt the truth of my words—and of your own senses, for you are not blind, nor a fool—in regard to Miss Chauncy, and you have determined to learn the truth from her own lips."

Tulip could not repress a motion of astonishment.

O'Connel's lips curled curiously; a second time his guess was right.

"You do not reply, gentlemen," he said, in his quiet, easy way. "My words are true, then, since you do not deny what I have stated. Now I can save you the trouble of carrying out your resolutions by telling you that you will fail."

Again, Tulip and Stoll looked at each other with eyes full of wonder.

"Montgomery will not give you, Stoll, one single inch of vantage; and the fair Frances, Tulip, will treat you in a most scornful manner and will refuse to satisfy you in any one particular." O'Connel spoke as lightly as if he were relating a pleasant jest, and yet his words were like hands playing upon the life-chords of two human hearts.

"And as you can read the future so well, can you tell us what we will do after we meet with these disappointments?" asked Tulip, in a tone slightly sarcastic.

"You will come to me and accept my assistance. Then we will form the League of Three and fight this single man," replied O'Connel, firmly.

"You are sure of this?" and a light laugh came from under Tulip's mask, as he asked the question, yet the ring of the laugh sounded hollow and false.

"Yes," and the Irishman spoke with a confident air. "But see, there are your birds," he continued. "Yonder is Montgomery searching through the throng as though looking for some one, and there in the corner of the room, seated, is Miss Chauncy. Now, gentlemen, try your luck, and within a quarter of an hour you will own that I am a true prophet."

For a moment the two stood, irresolute.

Then Tulip took a few steps in the direction of Miss Chauncy, and then paused, and turned, as if to put a question to O'Connel.

"You will find me on the balcony, outside, admiring the moon," the Irishman said.

Again Tulip was astonished, for O'Connel had guessed the question that he was about to put.

"Can this man read my very thoughts?" he muttered, and then he said aloud, "very well, I will see."

"You will come, you mean!" exclaimed the Irishman, laughing.

Tulip turned away without replying. In truth his brain was bewildered. He loved Frances Chauncy as few women in this world are loved. By day and night he dreamed only of the moment when he should have the right to fold her to his heart and call her his forever. And now a great gulf—as deep as his love and as broad as his despair—had opened between him and the object of his love. If the words of O'Connel were true—if he could believe the evidence of his own eyesight—she was false to the vows that she had sworn to him but a little month ago. His brain was on fire. Love and anger struggled for the mastery.

"If she is false to me—" he murmured, and there was a dreadful meaning in the unfinished sentence.

Slowly, he approached the chair where sat the blonde beauty.

After Tulip's departure, O'Connel turned to Stoll, who had remained, motionless.

"And are you not disposed to 'interview' Mr. Montgomery and find out whether I have spoken truth or no?" he asked.

The German, who was, apparently, deep in thought, lifted up his head at the words.

"Yonder he is, dressed as Hamlet," and O'Connel indicated Montgomery as he spoke.

"Yes, I see him," said Stoll, slowly.

"Your interview will be a short one; you'll find him more of a 'Shylock' than a 'Hamlet,' to-night," and O'Connel laughed as he spoke.

Stoll shivered. The cool words of the Irishman seemed to chill him like the touch of ice.

"You'll find me on the balcony."

Stoll mumbled something indistinctly, and hurried away.

"Shallow fools!" muttered O'Connel, his lip curling in disdain, "as if it needed witchcraft to fathom the thoughts in their minds or to guess what action Montgomery or delicate Frances Chauncy will take in this matter! Montgomery despises Stoll, because it is in his nature to despise any thing that is mean and low. He has Stoll on the hip and he'll make him sweat for what he has done. And as for the lady—there are no true women now-a-days—she is young, pretty and proud; an arrant flirt, and without the slightest bit of a heart. She has loved Tulip and has tired of him. She fancies that she now loves this Montgomery; she will hold to that fancy until she sees some one else that she will 'fancy' that she loves better. Then good-by to Mr. Montgomery. And such creatures are the ones that we men love with all our passions and call 'angels,' when, half the time, there is more of the lower world in their natures than the upper one. And yet I am as great a fool as the rest, for I love, too." And then he laughed, cynically. "How I hate this Montgomery!" he said, suddenly. "From love to hate, a quick transition and one that is made more than is dreamed of in this world. I have laid my plans skillfully. I'll pull this man down until he grovels in the dust at my feet. These two men, Tulip Roche and Herman Stoll, shall find me money. I myself have the tool wherewith to carve out my vengeance, and that tool is a woman. The old Turk was right when he said that women are at the bottom of every thing in this world. My siren shall lure him to destruction; lead him along the path that my hand will dig full of pitfalls." A hoarse laugh of triumph completed the sentence.

"It was strange that Montgomery should receive warning that danger lurked in his life-path," said O'Connel, musingly, as the words of the young man came back to his mind. "Possibly an idle jest—a masquerading joke. It is odd though, that it hit the truth so well. Now, I'll to my post on the balcony. In a few short minutes the League will be formed, and then for vengeance on the man that I hate so bitterly! Few could guess, to look upon this gay and brilliant scene, of the terrible scheme of vengeance that is to be born here amid the gay strains of music and the joyous laugh of merry voices. In this life it is sometimes hard to tell what mountain peak conceals the volcano."

Then O'Connel slowly made his way through the merry throng of laughing masqueraders and emerged from the heated ball-room to the balcony, swept by the cool winds of the ocean and lighted up by the silvery moonbeams.

After leaving O'Connel, Stoll proceeded across the ball-room to where Montgomery stood.

The young man had been anxiously searching through the throng of maskers for the veiled woman who had accosted him so mysteriously, but his search had been fruitless.

No White Witch could he find among the various groups of masqueraders.

Stoll approached Montgomery in a peculiar way. He did not proceed directly to where the young man stood, but circled round him in the crowd as if reluctant to approach him.

Montgomery, absorbed in his search for the strange mask, did not notice the approach of Stoll.

Montgomery was perplexed.

"What the deuce can it mean?" he muttered. "It seems more like a dream than a reality. Within one month or one year, love, wealth, all will disappear—all vanish. My friends will desert me. The woman that I love will forsake me. No, no, I am a fool to give such weight to idle words. Frances Chauncy is the woman that I love, and I'd stake my life upon her faith."

Unconsciously, Montgomery was uttering his thoughts aloud. Hardly had he finished the sentence ere a clear voice whispered in his ear:

"And lose it!"

For a moment Montgomery was transfixed with astonishment. Then, with an effort, recovering from his amazement he turned suddenly.

The voice that spoke the words was familiar to him. It was the voice of the White Witch.

But no white figure met Montgomery's eyes as he turned.

A slender female form, dressed in the dark robes of "Night," stood nearest to him.

"She may have changed her domino," muttered the young man, to himself; "I beg your pardon—did you speak to me?" he asked, of the dark figure.

The lady answered not, but with a movement of alarm retreated from him and disappeared in the crowd.

"Well, I've managed to frighten her," Montgomery muttered with a laugh. "Evidently I got hold of the wrong person. Deuced strange where the voice came from though."

CHAPTER V

THE GLOVE OF SILK AND HAND OF IRON.

By the time Montgomery had finished his speech, Stoll, who had been circling round him, like a great bird of prey circles around its quarry, finally made up his mind to accost him.

"Enjoying yourself, Mr. Montgomery?" he asked, in his smoothest way.

"Sir?" said Montgomery, turning in hauteur toward the German. He had recognized the voice in an instant.

"I asked if you were enjoying the masquerade," said Stoll, a little nettled at the tone used by the young man.

"I do not see how my enjoyment or non-enjoyment concerns you in any way," replied Montgomery, haughtily.

Stoll bit his thick lip to repress the anger that he did not dare to give utterance to. The words of Montgomery cut him to the quick, but the German had little idea of what was in store for him.

"I believe that you wished to see me," said Stoll, servilely. Since he was not strong enough to fight, he must bend.

"Yes, I suppose you can guess why I wished to see you, for of course you are well aware that I do not count you among the gentlemen whom I term my friends!"

More gall and wormwood for Stoll.

"I suppose I know," he answered, slowly.

"Lest there should be any misunderstanding upon that point, I will recapitulate the circumstances that led to this interview."

Stoll bowed assent, but bit his thick lip until the blood crimsoned his ugly, yellow teeth. But the mask hid his face.

"By some means you became a member of my club, probably through the ignorance of the gentlemen who compose that club as to who and what you were; even in these days, when money-bags are worshiped as gods and half the world bows to a golden idol, there are some things in this world that money can not cover. In the club-room you met me; you forced your society upon me. I possessed a trotting horse, reputed to be one of the fastest in New York. That horse I kept for my own amusement, not for racing purposes,

for I am neither a horse-jockey nor a 'black-leg.' You also owned a trotter. One that you fancied was the equal of mine. At least you said so, openly, and boasted that I did not dare to speed my horse against yours. Your boasts became the talk of the club. My friends became indignant and urged me to break my resolution and match my horse against yours. At last I consented to do so, provided you would put up five thousand dollars against five thousand of mine. The winner of the race to give one-half of the stake to some charitable object. And so the match was made. So far, so good. Now comes the sequel. You did not dream that I would take up your challenge, but after having made it, you could not retreat without losing caste. You did not think your horse could beat mine, but resolved to be certain. You went to my training stable on Long Island. You bought my trainer to your interest. He speeded the horse for you, and he beat the best time that your animal had ever made by some thirty seconds. You saw that in a square race you had no chance to save your money. Then, in order not to lose the paltry five thousand dollars that you had wagered, you offered my trainer a thousand dollars to allow my horse to be 'doctored,' or, in plainer words, poisoned. The poor, weak fool, who thought more of money than he did of his own conscience, agreed to poison the horse for you two nights before the race; and as the match was 'play or pay,' you thought yourself safe to humble me and save your own money. Thanks to an honest stable boy your scheme was revealed to me. My dishonest trainer was caught in the very act of poisoning the horse—that was last night. I was telegraphed for at once. When I arrived he confessed every thing. Now then, what shall I do? Shall I publish it to the world that Mr. Herman Stoll has sunk himself so low as to endeavor to commit a crime that will forever lose him the company of decent men; and shall I proceed against him in due course of law, and attempt to punish him for the outrage that he would have committed?"

Stoll's breath came thick and hard. Above all things in life he valued the opinion of the world.

"No, no, I'll do any thing you say, if you'll only hush the matter up," he gasped.

"Do you know why I feel inclined to 'hush the matter up,' as you term it?" asked Montgomery.

"No, I do not," answered Stoll, who knew very well that the reason could not concern him.

"It is on account of the poor devil that your money seduced to betray the master who had always treated him like a man. He has a wife and family and is a poor man. Your money tumbled him down from honesty—as many a better man than he has tumbled before. Now, if I turned that man adrift on the world with his character stained, what will be his fate?"

"He'll go to the dogs, most likely," answered Stoll, coarsely.

"Exactly, and if that man does turn to evil ways, on whose soul lies the guilt? Is he the guiltier one—a poor, weak fool, tempted by your money—or you, the knave, that tempted him to sin?"

"Knave!" cried Stoll, fiercely, in sullen wrath.

"Yes, knave!" repeated Montgomery, sternly. "Were I not a gentleman—and could find it in my heart to act the part of a bruiser—I'd take you by the throat and dash you down to the dust from which you sprung!"

Every muscle of Montgomery's powerful form swelled with indignation as he spoke.

Stoll curbed his wrath as well as he was able. He knew that he was no match for lithe, yet stalwart, Montgomery.

"Well, what do you want me to do, for I suppose you do want me to do something; unless you wished this interview solely for the purpose of bullying a man whose hands are tied and who can't strike back," Stoll said, sullenly.

"You are the first person in this world who has ever accused Angus Montgomery of being a bully; and we'll let that pass. As you have guessed, I do wish you to do something. The ruin of that man—whom I am about to cast out to the mercy of the world, for I can not find it in my heart to keep in my employ one who has betrayed me—hangs heavy upon my conscience. It is you who have ruined that man. I have determined to make you give him means by which for a time he can live. I don't mean that he shall go to the devil, per express. I think that with a fair chance he'll make an honest man again. You have led him into the mire of evil; it is but fair that you should pull him out again."

"What do you wish me to do?" growled Stoll, in a very unamiable voice.

"Give that man five thousand dollars to start him again in the world. With that sum he can go West, buy a farm, and become a respectable member of society once more," answered Montgomery.

"Five thousand dollars!" exclaimed Stoll, in amazement.

"That's the sum, exactly, and in addition, you must retire from the club that you have disgraced. Fulfill these conditions, and I'll hold my tongue. Refuse, and to-morrow I'll have you published in every paper in the country for the scoundrel that you are."

Stoll's wrath almost choked him, but, like the wolf in the pitfall, he felt that he was impotent to fly or fight. Above all things in life, he valued the position that he had managed to obtain in New York. He knew well that fully one-half of his associates, if not all, would turn their backs upon him were his deeds to be made public. Even New York society has some self-respect, though, from its action, one would not be apt to think so.

"Well, I accept, though the conditions are hard ones. Perhaps, some time, Mr. Montgomery, you may get into debt. All the ill-luck I wish you is, that your creditors may be as hard as you are in this case," Stoll said, in ill-humor.

"When I act like a scoundrel, I trust that I may be treated like one," Montgomery replied, with bitter emphasis. Stoll winced at the words.

"Send me your check for the money, and then you can consider the affair settled," Montgomery added.

"Very well," Stoll said, doggedly.

"By the way, one word," Montgomery exclaimed, as Stoll was about to turn away. "I suppose that it is hardly necessary to mention that in the future, when we meet, I would prefer that you should pass me by without noticing me. By so doing, you will be spared the unpleasantness of being 'cut' by me, for I give my word that I shall never be able to see you, large as you are."

Then Montgomery passed away, and was soon lost amid the crowd of maskers.

Stoll ground his teeth in bitter rage.

"Curse him!" he cried. "I'll be even with him for this, if it takes me all my life. That infernal O'Connel spoke truth. I'll join him to be revenged upon this proud Montgomery. He's waiting on the balcony. He said in fifteen minutes. He's right almost to a second."

With bitter thoughts and an angry face, Stoll took his way toward the door leading to the moonlit balcony.

Tulip Roche proceeded slowly along through the crowded room, to the place where Frances Chauncey sat, watching the dancers.

"Good-evening," said Tulip, approaching the blonde beauty.

"Is that you, Tulip?" said Frances, languidly.

"Yes; are you tired?"

"Of moving around?—yes."

"Wasn't that Mr. Montgomery with you a moment or two ago, dressed as 'Hamlet'?"

"Yes."

"Frances, do you know I do not think that you have treated me right, lately?" Tulip said, leaning over the back of her chair.

"Indeed!—how?"

"I have heard strange reports regarding you and this Montgomery—"

"Well, what have you heard?" interrupted Frances, a little more life manifest in her manner.

"That you are engaged to him."

For a moment Frances did not reply. She tapped her pretty little foot upon the floor, and bit her lower lip perversely. Then suddenly she raised her head, and spoke.

"Suppose that it is the truth?" she asked, half defiantly.

"Is it the truth?" Tulip questioned, earnestly.

"Well, I—" and the beauty paused in evident confusion.

"It is true, then, and your words to me—your vows—are all forgotten!" Tulip cried, in deep agony.

"Why, I didn't know that you were in earnest. I thought that it was only a flirtation—I never did so before with any one—we can always be friends—I—and—" Frances came to an end in terrible confusion.

"Oh, of course it was all a flirtation," Tulip said, bitterly; "I never meant one word of what I said, when I told you that I loved you, and wished you for my wife—I only meant it as a joke—and a very pleasant one it has been, too—I—" Tulip turned away; his voice became husky and choked in his throat.

Frances rose in confusion, and without even a farewell word, left him. Tulip fairly trembled with rage.

CHAPTER VI.

THREE DROPS OF BLOOD.

FOR a moment Tulip remained motionless, like one struck by sudden stupor. Then at last he found his tongue.

"Cold, false-hearted woman!" he cried, in anger. "The Irishman was right; I need his aid. I'll be revenged upon Montgomery, even if it costs me my own life. Let me see! O'Connel said that I would find him on the balcony. I'll seek him at once."

Tulip then proceeded across the ball-room toward the door that led to the balcony.

At the door he met Stoll.

"Well?" questioned Tulip.

"O'Connel was right," Stoll said, moodily.

"Right in my case, also."

"And are you going to accept the offer he made you?"

"Yes."

"So am I."

"Let us find him, then."

The two passed through the door to the balcony. At the lower end of the broad plaza, leaning on the railing and looking seaward, they saw the man they sought, Lionel O'Connel.

"There he is," Stoll said.

"Yes," Tulip answered, and then they hastened to him.

The two, absorbed in their search for the Irishman, did not notice that a slender female form, clad in the sable robes of "Night," had followed closely upon their heels. So close, in fact, that she had overheard every word of their conversation.

The woman dressed as "Night" followed them out upon the balcony. Then, secure from observation—for the balcony held only the three men, and their backs were turned upon her—with a motion, quick as thought, she stripped the sable domino from her form, then tore the black veil from her face, and the White Witch stood revealed!

"I hold the game in my hands," she murmured, evidently under the influence of strong excitement. "Now, if I can but get Montgomery to believe my word, or if not that, to believe the evidence of his own senses, he may avoid the danger that is before him."

She watched Tulip and Stoll join O'Connel, retiring to the helter of the doorway as she watched, so as to be secure from the observation of the three, should they chance to look in her direction.

"There is a window near them," she murmured. "By placing Montgomery at that window, he can see, if not hear. The window is not in the ball-room, but in the apartment adjoining. Now to find Montgomery, and, if possible, put him upon his guard."

Concealing the sable dress and veil beneath her own white robes, the mysterious woman returned to the ball-room.

She was not long in discovering Montgomery.

The young man was promenading up and down with the blonde beauty, Frances Chauncey, on his arm.

"Again with that girl!" exclaimed the White Witch, in anger; "the false heart who has already forsaken Tulip Roche for him, and will in turn forsake him for some other. Why should I not let these conspirators go on and strip him of his wealth? The loss of it will save him from the fatal love of this fair-haired siren. She loves but his gold, his position, and not the man. Oh, I blush sometimes for my sex; barely one true heart among a thousand false ones. But I will save him! save him from this woman, whose false love will drive him some day to despair; save him from Tulip Roche, the treacherous friend, and from Herman Stoll, the open enemy; save him from his evil genius, Lionel O'Connel, the chief of this secret League of Three, and who is more to be feared than all the rest combined. He is both lion and snake; as brave and strong as the first, as cold and bloodless as the second. If Montgomery will only believe my words, I will give him a shield against which they shall break their lances of malice in vain."

Then, the White Witch proceeded across the ball-room, passed by Montgomery and Frances, who hung so lovingly upon his arm, and, as she passed, she touched the young man.

Montgomery turned at the light touch, and saw in an instant who it was that had passed him.

He half-turned as if to follow her on the moment, but he remembered that he had a lady on his arm and paused.

"Will you excuse me for a few minutes? Some one has just passed, with whom I wish to speak," he said.

"Certainly, but don't be long, Angus," Frances said, lovingly.

"I will return in an instant. Shall I conduct you to a seat?"

"No, I am tired of sitting down, I will promenade until you return," she replied.

With a low bow, Montgomery retired from her side and followed the White Witch, who was walking, slowly, through the throng of maskers.

Montgomery soon came up with her.

"I have been looking for you."

"I know that," she replied.

"And you have avoided my search?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Because a witch must be mysterious in her actions; she must not be found, easily, like common mortals."

"I have been thinking over your words, and I confess I can not understand how it is that you seem to know me so well, for I am sure that you are a stranger to me."

"You are right; I am," she said.

"How, then, can you know aught of me?"

"Did I not tell you that I am the WHITE WITCH?" she asked.

"Enough of such jesting!" he exclaimed, impatiently. "What is the meaning of all this? Is it a masquerading joke?"

"You will find that it is no jest, but sober reality," returned the White Witch, solemnly.

By this time, the two had reached a small ante-room leading from the ball-room.

The apartment was unoccupied.

"Here, then, we can speak freely," said the strange woman, glancing, searchingly, around her.

"I confess that you have strangely excited my curiosity," said Montgomery. "You have predicted strange and wonderful things; assailed the woman whom I love and the man whose friendship I cherish."

"And yet I have spoken but the truth, as you will find in time."

"The woman that I love will forsake me?"

"Yes."

"My friend will betray me?"

"Yes, again."

"All this is very mysterious."

"And very true."

"Perhaps so."

"You will find that it is so."

"You have something else to tell me?"

"What makes you think so?"

"You touched my arm just now in passing. That was clearly a sign that you wished to speak with me, and I take it that you are too sensible a 'witch' to wish to repeat what you have already told me," said Montgomery, gallantly.

"You are right. I have something else to tell you."

"I was certain of it."

"Something to show you, perhaps."

"Feast my eyes as well as my ears, eh?" Montgomery said, with a laugh.

"Yes."

"Well, I am ready."

"You remember my former words?"

"Within one month or one year?—yes," the young man replied.

"I predicted the loss of all that you held dear in this world."

"You did."

"But I did not tell you in what way that terrible loss would come upon you."

"Probably the reason for that is, that you do not know," Montgomery said, a slight touch of sarcasm in his tone.

"You are wrong, I do know," replied the mysterious woman, quickly.

"Elucidate—don't keep me in suspense," laughingly said the young man.

"One word does that."

"And that word?"

"Woman!"

"Oh, then it is a woman who is to bring all these evils upon me?"

"Yes."

"And yet I do not remember a single woman in this world who has cause to look upon me in the light of an enemy," said Montgomery, seriously.

"The woman who will bring you to ruin is not your enemy; she is your friend."

For a moment, Montgomery was silent. He was perplexed.

"All this seems like a joke, but the jest is getting to be quite a serious one," he said, at length.

"For your sake, would to heaven that it were a jest!" exclaimed the masked woman, earnestly. "But, in time to come, you will find that I have only spoken the truth. This woman, who is fated to lead you to your ruin, loves you better than she does her own life—better than she does her own soul—for she would risk that soul to save you from your danger; from that danger into which her own hand must lead you."

"If she loves me, why should she lead me into danger?" asked Montgomery, who had listened to the strange words of the White Witch in utter astonishment.

"Because she is under the influence of a will, more powerful than her own. She is your slave by love; she is the slave to another, bound unto him by a stronger passion, even, than her love for you. She must do his bidding and draw you, siren-like, to the path, wherein are dug the pitfalls to ensnare you. She is the creature of the chief of the League of Three."

"The League of Three?" exclaimed Montgomery, in astonishment. "Why, all this seems like a leaf torn out of some old romance of ancient times. The days of leagues and secret brotherhoods have died away."

"They have revived one for your especial benefit," replied the Witch. "Three men have bound themselves together to humble you, and their chief instrument will be the woman who loves you so well. One alone, in all this world, can save you!"

"And who is that person?"

"She stands before you, the White Witch. When danger comes thick around your path, I will be near to guard you. I may not be able to defeat your enemies, but, with the aid of Heaven, I will try."

"This seems like a dream," Montgomery said, in wonder.

"Behold the reality!" cried the Witch, suddenly, and she drew aside the curtains of the window by which they stood.

The window looked out upon the balcony.

Montgomery's eyes beheld a strange scene.

Three men were in the moonlight.

One knelt in the center, clad as a white clown; over him stood a gray monk and a gay courtier. On the balcony, before the kneeling man in white, was an open sheet of paper. Over the paper the clown held his wrist. On the wrist was a slight puncture, from which a drop of blood was slowly welling.

A small penknife, its blade open, glittered in the hand of the clown.

"Come, gentlemen, the seals—three drops of blood!" cried the man in white.

The fresh ocean breeze brought the words to the listening ears of awe-struck Montgomery.

He started.

In the voice of the man in white, he recognized the clear tones of the young Irishman, Lionel O'Connell.

CHAPTER VII.

THE LEAGUE OF THREE.

MONTGOMERY could not understand the meaning of the strange scene that met his eyes as he looked through the window upon the balcony.

A moment he gazed in speechless astonishment, and then turned to question his companion; but, to his amazement, he found that he was alone. The White Witch was gone.

"This is like a dream!" Montgomery cried, perplexed; "but, if she is in the ball-room, I'll find her."

Then he instantly proceeded on his quest.

Vainly he searched amid the group of maskers. No White Witch could he find.

Tulip and Stoll found O'Connell on the balcony.

The young Irishman was leaning against the railing, apparently in deep thought.

O'Connell raised his head as the two approached. He had removed the clownish mask, with its huge nose, from his face, and the moonbeams lighted up his pale and clearly-cut features.

In face, the young Irishman was singularly handsome. The keen, blue eye, the firm-set, resolute mouth told of a determined will. Over his forehead clustered little, crispy

curls, a rich gold in hue, and a long, drooping mustache, of the same tint as the hair, hid his full, sensual lips.

As Stoll and Tulip approached, they also removed their masks from their faces.

The face of Tulip was as pale as death, except where a hectic flush burned in either cheek; while Stoll's coarse features were crimsoned with anger.

There was a lurking devil in O'Connel's eye as he watched the approach of the two.

"Well?" he said, quietly, as the two came up to him.

"You're a true prophet," replied Stoll, in a sulky way.

"And my words in regard to the fair Frances?" O'Connel asked Tulip.

"True, every one," replied the "blood," with an angry gesture.

"And now you seek my aid?"

"Yes," replied Stoll, quickly, and Tulip bowed his head in the affirmative.

"Good, and now let us have a clear understanding."

"The sooner the better," said Stoll.

"We three hate this one man?"

"Yes," replied Tulip and Stoll, in a breath.

"And our purpose is to pull him down—to ruin him if we can?"

"Yes," again they replied.

"And therefore we form a League of Three. Montgomery is to be ruined. And to effect our object we will use any and all means, be the means fair or foul."

"Exactly," Stoll said.

"Montgomery is rich, honored, and beloved. We must steal his riches from him, tarnish his good name, and deprive him of the woman of his heart."

"That's the programme," said Stoll, coarsely.

Tulip said nothing, but his eyes signified his assent.

"And as to the victors belong the spoils, we must arrange a fair division of what is to come to us from the ruin of this man. First comes Frances Chauncy; for the possession of a beautiful woman—to the man that loves her—outweighs all else in this world. You, Tulip, shall have Montgomery's promised bride. Then comes money; that shall be equally divided between Herman, here, and myself. Is the division satisfactory, gentlemen?"

"Perfectly," said Tulip.

"Quite square," responded Stoll.

"Now for the sinews of war—money. I think that it is but fair that you two should furnish that, since I have furnished the idea."

"Yes, that's only fair," said Stoll, after a moment's thought.

"How much do you require?" Tulip asked.

"Say six thousand dollars; that will do for the present. We must have tools, gentlemen, and human instruments, such as we shall have to use, will cost money. The task we have undertaken will be no child's play," O'Connel said, seriously.

"The sum is little enough. I, myself, would rather give six thousand than have Frances Chauncy become the wife of Angus Montgomery!" Tulip exclaimed, earnestly.

"And you still want this girl who has proved false to you?" O'Connel asked.

"Yes; I do not blame her, but him. She is young, does not know her own mind, and he, in some way, has dazzled her senses," Tulip replied.

"Then it is perfectly understood; the girl to you, the money to us?"

Both nodded assent.

"Then we may consider ourselves a League of Three, each pledged to aid the other to the utmost extent of his power—even to the risk of life—in this, our enterprise," O'Connel said.

"But, shall we go as far as to think of attempting the life of this man?" Stoll asked, with a dark look upon his coarse features.

"No," replied O'Connel, quickly. "We will not strike at his life. We will strip him of all else, but his life shall be sacred from our hands."

"It is better so," said Tulip.

"Well, just as you please," Stoll observed, carelessly.

"The money will be ready to-morrow?" O'Connel asked.

"Of course," Tulip replied, and Stoll nodded assent.

"Then to-morrow the League will commence operations."

"What are you going to do first?" asked Stoll.

"That requires consideration," replied O'Connel, with a light laugh. "It is no easy matter to ruin a man with a

hundred thousand dollars, and above all, such a man as Angus Montgomery—a cool, clear-headed fellow, who is neither a 'flat' nor a fool. If he were a fast young man now, our task would be easy enough. We could lure him on to play and by the blackleg's aid fleece him of his money."

"He doesn't indulge in such pleasures," said Tulip.

"And therefore our task is a difficult one. It is easy to say, 'we three hate this man and we will ruin him,' but to accomplish that ruin is quite another thing."

"Very true," Stoll said, thoughtfully.

"Now, in the first place, what is Montgomery really worth?" asked O'Connel.

"Somewhere about a hundred thousand; his wealth is greatly exaggerated," replied Tulip.

"That is not uncommon. What does his wealth consist of?"

"A house on the avenue—"

"Worth how much?" interrupted O'Connel.

"About thirty thousand."

"And the lot itself?"

"From twelve to fifteen thousand."

"Then, if the house should burn down, he would be out about fifteen thousand."

"No," replied Tulip, "it is nearly all covered by insurance."

"Possibly there is a way to get over that," O'Connel said thoughtfully. "And the rest of his property?"

"Invested in government bonds, railroad stock, etc."

"Our scheme will require some head-work, but in the end we will triumph. I shall go to New York by the first train to-morrow. There I will secure my principal instrument."

"Some smart, keen-witted man that you know, eh?" Stoll asked.

"No, quite the contrary," said O'Connel, smiling; "my instrument is a young and pretty woman."

"A woman!" his companions exclaimed, in astonishment.

"Exactly."

"What part will she play in our scheme?" asked Stoll, amazed.

"That of the false beacon-light, which, in the darkness of the night, lures the tempest-tossed mariner to the reefs, whereon his vessel is wrecked," replied the Irishman, quickly.

"Oh, I see; this woman is to fascinate Montgomery," said Tulip.

"I fear that it will be a difficult task," Stoll observed, thoughtfully. "If report speaks true, Montgomery is in love with Frances Chauncy."

"That may be true, but that love will not save him from the snare that my instrument will weave around his soul. The woman, whose will I control, is more beautiful than this New York belle, for she has all the fire and passion that Frances Chauncy lacks, and has fully as pretty a face. Trust me, her arts will win him, despite his love for the other girl."

"Who is this woman?" asked Stoll.

"That is my secret," replied O'Connel with one of his peculiar, baffling smiles.

"I get the idea!" cried Stoll, suddenly. "You intend to use this money that we have contributed to buy the services of this woman?"

"No, there you are wrong. There isn't money enough in all New York to buy this woman's will. If there was—if she could be bought by money—she would be useless for our purpose," said O'Connel, gravely.

"Why then is she willing to serve you?" asked Stoll, bluntly.

"That is my secret, too," replied O'Connel. "Suffice it, that she will do as I say. The money I shall use for the details of my plan, not to pay her for her services."

"And you have no doubt of success?" asked Tulip.

"Not the slightest," replied O'Connel, confidently; "within a year at most, Angus Montgomery will be a ruined man."

"Good!" exclaimed Stoll, rubbing his hands together in glee, while a dark smile came over Tulip's delicate features.

"The League then is formed. Mind, we are sworn to aid one another in our purpose, even to death, for all three of us may have to stain our hands in crime to accomplish our object," said O'Connel, with a serious face.

"I fully understand that for one," said Stoll, firmly.

"And so do I," added Tulip.

"Gentlemen, I foresaw that we should agree in this matter and so I drew out a memorandum—a special partnership

between us three." Then O'Connel drew a folded paper from his pocket. He opened it and read aloud:

"We three do hereby unite in a solemn League against our common enemy. We hereby agree, each to aid the other in the attacks to be made upon him. And we swear, that with our own hands, we will kill any one of this League who shall prove false to the compact. We seal this oath with our blood."

Stoll and Tulip looked at each other.

"Are we to sign this?" asked Stoll, slowly.

"With your written signatures, no; that would be dangerous should the paper happen to be lost," replied O'Connel; "our signatures to this paper and our seals will be three drops of blood; one drop from each. That binds us to the compact. We spill our blood to seal it, and we'll spill the blood of the one breaks it. Is this satisfactory?"

"Yes," said Stoll.

"Perfectly," Tulip added.

Then O'Connel dropped on his knee and spread the paper out before him. He drew a little penknife from his pocket and with the point of the blade, made a slight puncture in his wrist.

A single drop of blood welled slowly from the slight scratch.

"Come, gentlemen, the seals!" he cried; "three drops of blood!"

Then with the point of the knife he stained the paper with the blood.

Stoll and Tulip followed his example.

Then the paper, thus strangely signed and sealed, was conveyed to O'Connel's pocket again.

"This oath that we have sworn sounds like a romance," O'Connel said, "but before a month is over, Angus Montgomery will find that it is bitter reality."

Then they returned to the ball-room.

The League of Three was formed.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE INSTRUMENT.

THE first train out of Newport, on the morning following the night wherein the events related in our last chapter took place, among its passengers, carried Tulip Roche, Herman Stoll and Lionel O'Connel.

They were en route for New York.

The League of Three was preparing to strike its first blow at Angus Montgomery.

On the journey, Tulip and Stoll noticed that their companion was strangely silent. But by the earnest look upon his handsome face, they guessed that his brain was busy in devising how to bring their common enemy to grief.

As the three arrived in New York and alighted from the car, a newsboy by the depot was crying his "Extras."

"'Ere's the hextra Telegram—full account of the mysterious disappearance of E'ward Catlin, the Wall street banker!"

As the cry of the boy reached Tulip's ears, he grasped O'Connel by the arm, and an expression of joy flushed his pale features.

"Do you hear that?" he cried.

"What?" asked O'Connel, in astonishment.

"What the boy is crying," answered Tulip, quickly.

"Here, boy, give me a paper!"

The boy received his money, handed over the sheet and departed to cry his papers elsewhere.

Tulip's eyes searched the news column eagerly.

"Here it is!" Then he read aloud to his listening companions.

"Sudden and mysterious disappearance of the well-known Wall street banker, Mr. Edward Catlin. This gentleman has not been seen since he left his office in Wall street yesterday afternoon about four o'clock. It has been whispered on the 'street' for some time that Mr. Catlin was in difficulties, pecuniarily, he having been one of the sufferers on the memorable 'Good Friday,' when the gold bubble exploded. It is rumored that his paper to a large amount came due to-day, and being unable to meet it, he has fled where 'the woobine twinsth.' A painful rumor is also afloat that Mr. Catlin has committed suicide. The truth will probably be known in a few days. Quite a number who banked with Mr. Catlin will suffer by the event."

"This is glorious news!" cried Tulip, in joy, after he had finished the brief notice relative to the disappearance of the banker.

"I don't understand," said O'Connel.

"Nor I!" Stoll chimed in.

"Why, fate itself is on our side and strikes the first blow at our foe."

"Explain."

"This man who has fled, leaving his creditors in the lurch, is the banker of Angus Montgomery!" cried Tulip, in triumph.

His two companions now understood the reason of his joy, and their faces, too, brightened up.

"You think then that Montgomery will be a sufferer by the flight of the banker?" O'Connel asked.

"I know that he will," Tulip replied, quickly. "Only a week ago I came to the city with him, and he placed twenty thousand dollars in this Catlin's hands."

"Then the probabilities are that Mr. Angus Montgomery is just that twenty thousand dollars poorer by this little mischance," Stoll said, in coarse glee.

"Yes," Tulip replied.

"So much the better," said O'Connel, cheerfully, "it lightens our work, that is if they don't happen to catch the banker and make him disgorge."

"Not much chance of that, the man is probably safe off by this time," Tulip observed.

"I wonder if the police are on his track," said Stoll.

Tulip glanced at the newspaper.

"Yes; it says that the detectives are on the look-out for him."

"And extremely unlikely to catch him," remarked O'Connel, contemptuously. "It is only the common ruffian that they secure. The man with brains escapes them nine times out of ten."

"Montgomery will arrive in town to-morrow. Will you fix upon a plan of action to-night?" Tulip asked of O'Connel.

"Yes," he answered. "I'll meet you at the Fifth Avenue Hotel to-morrow at ten in the morning. I shall proceed to the house of the lady, who is to play the role of Delilah and shear this modern Sampson of his locks of strength, at once."

"There is no doubt about securing her?"

"None at all," O'Connel answered, confidently. "She will do my bidding, I am sure of it. Once the eyes of Montgomery fall upon her face, good-by to his love for Frances Chauncy."

"In the morning at ten?"

"Yes."

And so the three parted. The triple League. Three men, so unlike each other in every respect, yet bound together by the hatred that they had in common for Angus Montgomery. Links of steel were as chains to the strength of that bond.

Tulip and Stoll went up the avenue, while O'Connel passed through Twenty-seventh street to Broadway.

As O'Connel turned into the busy thoroughfare, he came face to face with a little, dapper fellow, with a round, bullet-like head, who was slowly coming up Broadway, sucking a quill toothpick between his teeth in a manner indicative of profound enjoyment.

O'Connel, proceeding rapidly along, turned the corner sharply, and nearly run over the man with the quill toothpick.

With a careless "I beg pardon," the young man turned to one side and passed on down the street.

The man with the quill toothpick, stood like one turned into stone, and gazed after O'Connel with a face full of wonder. The toothpick dropped from his mouth, and lay unheeded upon the pavement.

"Well, jigger my buttons!" said the man, with a low whistle of astonishment. "It is—and then ag'in, it may not be. If it is—will I, or won't I? Who knows? Now, that's philosophy, that is. In the first place, I must keep one eye on him."

Then the man missed his toothpick, and discovered it on the sidewalk.

"Now, meeting this 'ere nobby chap has cost me a brand-new toothpick; suppose that the same little incident costs him his life? That's a riddle. I give it up."

Then the man drew another quill toothpick from his vest-pocket, placed it between his teeth, and followed in chase of O'Connel.

The young man had not given the stranger a second thought, but hastened onward, his mind busy with the meeting that was before him. He had no suspicion that his steps were watched so closely.

O'Connel went down Broadway to Tenth street; went down Tenth street a few blocks, then ascended the steps of a three-story brick dwelling, rung the bell, and shortly after was admitted into the house.

The man with the toothpick had followed him carefully on the other side of the street. When the young man entered the house, the watcher closed one eye and gazed with a knowing look at the dwelling.

"Ten to one that he don't live there! Ten to one that he'll come out! Ten to one that it's the bird, although t'other bird had black hair, and this 'un the color of a cornstalk. Maybe he's dyed it. Why not? Don't the blonde actresses who make a living by displaying their legs—'cos they hain't got any brains—don't they dye? Of course! Why shouldn't he? Rayther! De-lightful prospect this is, round here. Guess I'll wait for a few hours, days, or so. Pipgan, old boy, I shakes hands with you!" And then the odd genius shook hands with himself violently. "Now, I'll just wait, and while I wait, I'll keep my eyes open; as a Pacific sloper would say, you bet!"

The man with the quill toothpick selected a doorstep a little way up the street, sat down on it, and commenced humming a song to himself. What the words of the verses were wasn't very clear, but the chorus came out strong:

"Ti-u-ral li-u ral, li-a!"

We will follow O'Connel.

He has entered one of the back chambers of the three-story brick, and a young girl has risen to receive him.

The room is furnished plainly, and amid its somber hue the beauty of the girl shines like a rich jewel in a leaden setting.

The girl looked some twenty years of age. In figure she was about the medium height, and as straight as the pine-tree, yet all the supple grace of the swaying willow was in every motion. Her face was a classical one—pure Greek; the low forehead; the rounded chin; the straight nose; the dainty lips, red as the carnation flower, and perfect in their sweet outline; the little pearl-like teeth that the red lips guarded; the lustrous black eyes, that could flash with all the fires of passion's rage or melt with all the softness of love's tenderness; the transparent skin, white as alabaster; the long, silken hair, black as the raven's wing, and coiled in shining braids around the shapely, well-poised head—all was perfection itself.

The face of the girl was one not seen once in a thousand years. A face that a painter might see in a vision, when he dreamed of angels' forms.

She was dressed plainly in dark-crimson stuff. A little white linen collar and cuffs of the same material were the only adornments she wore.

As O'Connel looked at her, he could not help confessing to himself that he had never seen a more lovely girl.

She was called Leone Basque; by profession a music-teacher.

O'Connel was apparently her only friend, for he alone visited her, and the gossip of the boarding-house—for such was the character of the house that O'Connel had entered—whispered that the young man was probably a lover of Miss Leone's, and in due time would become her husband.

"Well?" the girl asked, in icy tones, rising as her visitor entered the room.

"Why, Leone, your tone is as cold as the wind on a winter's morning," said O'Connel, carelessly throwing himself into a chair.

"Is it?" replied the girl, resuming her seat.

"Yes; but, bless you, I don't mind it in the least. Leone, there is a great deal of the angel about you, and a great deal of the old gentleman down below, when you let your temper get the best of you."

"You have no cause to say that!" cried the girl, quickly. "I have done more for you than one-half the women in this world would do."

"Yes, I know that," O'Connel replied, languidly. "But once in a while you give me a terrible talking to."

"When you bind any one's hands, what can they use but the tongue?" asked the girl, bitterly.

"That's very true. I suppose, then, that you mean that I have bound your hands, figuratively speaking."

"Yes, with an iron chain," returned the girl, sadly.

"Well, I am glad that you fully understand that fact. That knowledge on your part will save me considerable trouble," said O'Connel, coolly.

"I do not understand what you mean." The girl spoke slowly, and her face showed plainly that she was puzzled.

"Oh, I'm going to explain my meaning fully," said O'Connel, quickly. "In the first place, I want something. By the way, to want something is not an unusual occurrence with me," and he laughed as he spoke.

"Is it money?—because I have none." The girl spoke sharply, and a slight touch of anger was plainly perceptible in her voice.

"Your guess does credit to your understanding. As a general thing, I am sorry to say that I am usually in want of money; but this time it is something else. How would you like to be a countess?" he asked, suddenly.

The girl looked at the speaker in wonder.

CHAPTER XI.

THE REPRESENTATIVE FROM BAXTER STREET.

ANGUS MONTGOMERY arrived in New York some four hours after O'Connel and his companions. He had received a telegram regarding the flight of the banker, and had hastened to New York at once.

On arriving in the city, he proceeded instantly to the Central Police Station, anxious to discover if any news had been received of the whereabouts of the absconding Catlin.

The detectives could not furnish him with any information.

All avenues leading from the city had been carefully watched, but, as yet, without avail.

"Bless you! he's probably on board of an ocean steamer 'fore this time," said the detective in charge of the office, "or else he's made tracks west for California. You see, he had a good twelve or eighteen hours' start, and was probably safe out of the city long before the case was put into our hands."

"Then there isn't much hope of capturing him?" Montgomery said.

"No, not much chance to put salt on the tail of such an old bird as he is. He's probably been preparing for this little trip for some time," was the detective's answer.

"If any news does come, I wish you would notify me; here's my address," Angus said.

"Certainly," the detective replied, as he took the card whereon Montgomery had penciled his street and number.

Then the young man left the office, about as wise as when he entered it.

On the sidewalk outside he met another of the detectives, who was well known to him.

"Hello! why, Mr. Montgomery, what are you doing here? nothing wrong, I hope," said the detective.

"No, nothing very particular, Mr. Kelso," Montgomery replied. "I came down to inquire if any news of this absconding banker, Catlin, has been received."

"Oh, you are concerned in that affair?"

"Well, yes; about twenty thousand dollars' worth. I only banked the money with him a week or so ago. I sold out some stock and was looking around for another investment," Montgomery remarked, with a dry smile.

"Twenty thousand!" exclaimed the jolly officer, with a prolonged whistle; "well, I should say that you were a leetle concerned in the affair. Any news of him, inside?"

"None at all. The officer in charge says it is probable that he is safe out of New York by this time."

"I hardly think so," said the officer, slowly. "I think it is more probable that he is concealed in the city somewhere, waiting for this row to blow over, and then he'll 'light out,' as they say West."

"Do you really think so?"

"Yes, I do," said the officer, decidedly.

"Then there is a chance, that he may fall into the hands of the detectives?" Montgomery asked, eagerly.

"Of course."

"Then I won't utterly despair."

"No, while there's life, there's hope, you know."

Montgomery bid the detective "good-night," and walked slowly down the street.

He did not notice that a man, who had stood in the shadow of the houses while he was conversing with the officer, and was so near that he could overhear every word of the conversation, was following in his footsteps.

As Montgomery turned the corner of Bleecker street, the man hastened his steps and overtook him.

"Mr. Montgomery!" he said, in a hoarse voice, and with a cautious accent.

"Eh?" and Montgomery turned sharply around and faced the man who had followed him.

He saw a roughly-clad little fellow, with a hang-dog look.

"I axes your parding for a speakin' to you. I thinks that maybe that wot I've got for to say, you'd like for to hear," said the fellow, in a servile way.

Montgomery felt a shudder of disgust creep over him as he looked into the evil eyes of the fellow who had addressed him.

"Well, sir, what is it?" Angus asked.

"If I don't make no mistake you wants to know where a certain cove, whose name ain't Jones, and whose name is Mr. Edward Catlin, is to be found?" said the fellow with a cunning leer.

"Do you know where this man is?" asked Montgomery, quickly.

"Well, I don't tell all I knows for nothink," said the man, with a grin.

With difficulty, Montgomery repressed the loathing that the man caused him. He thought, possibly, that he could gain some information from the fellow.

"If you do know any thing regarding the whereabouts of this man, by making it known to one of the officers in the station yonder, they will, beyond a doubt, pay you well for it."

"Yes, I knows wot *their* pay is—more kicks than half-pence," said the man, with an injured air. "If I was for to go and tell 'em wot I knows, then they'd jist collar this cove, pocket the reward and leave me to whistle for my trouble, bless 'em!" The fellow didn't exactly say "bless 'em," but a due regard for our readers compels us to suppress his real exclamation.

"Well, to what use do you intend to put the information that you have?" asked Montgomery.

"I'll tell 'er in the wag of a sheep's tail," said the man, with a grin. "You see I kin put my two fingers right onto this man inside of half an hour."

"You can?" asked Montgomery.

"Cert'," said the fellow, tersely; "in course, I kin! I know where he's a-hidin', a-waitin' for a chance to 'hook it,' when the perlice ain't a-lookin' for him. You kin b'leeve wot I say, 'cos my pals allers calls me honest Tom, 'the Mouse'—"

"The Mouse!" said Montgomery, astonished at the nickname.

"In course; 'cos I'm so quiet, and sly, and so harmless, you know. Now jist by accident I see'd this, Mr. Catlin a-hidin' in a certain place—which at present I'll keep unbeknown—an' I says to myself, says I, Tom, here's a chance for to turn an honest penny,—'cos I wouldn't do nothink that wasn't strictly co-rect for any think. I says to myself, says I, jist you find one of those swells up town who has a wital interest in this here absconding cove, tell what you know, an' may be, if he's a gent—like yourself maybe—beggin' your honor's parding for makin' so free with you—why he'll come down handsome for the 'tip.'"

"Tip?"

"Yes, the news, you know; that's wot we say across the water when we knows that one horse is bound for to win an' another for to lose."

Montgomery thought for a moment.

"You can take me to this man, Catlin?"

"You kin take your 'davy on it," replied "The Mouse."

"Can I take an officer with me?"

"Wot's the use of that now, I axes you?" said the fellow, in an aggrieved way. "It ain't the cheese, you know, for to bring the hawks down onto a feller wot's in difficulties. But now this is the way I puts it—beggin' your honor's parding, for being so familiar to give advice to a nob, like your honor is. But this t'other cove he's cut his stick with a tidy pile of your honor's money. Now I, like a good 'un—as my pals say I is—I brings this nob—meanin' you—to t'other, wot's keepin' shady. Why then, in course, you kin settle the rumpus an' no one the wiser; and you can give 'The Mouse' smethink handsome for his honesty, you know."

"Let me put my hands on him once and I'll make him refund my money or strangle him!" said Montgomery, fiercely.

"In course you will!" cried "The Mouse," softly, and in a tone of intense admiration. "I knew it; the minit I set eyes on yer, I said to myself, says I, 'ere's the nob wot kin put his hands up along with Jem Mace or any one of them coves; blessed if I didn't!" and "The Mouse" chuckled softly to himself.

"What do you ask for this service?"

"I don't ax nothink; I ain't the cove to say to the nob, like yourself, wot'll you give me. No! I knows better nor that. I leaves it to yer gener'us feelin's, for I knows well 'nough that a reg'lar out an' outer—like your honor—is a-goin' to do the tidy think with the cove wot helps him, you know. Now if you let these de-tectives—bless their eyes!—into the job, why the cake's all dough and we shan't get a smell. They'll gobble up all the swag. Now I'll take your honor down to where this cove is a-hidin', an' you kin settle the think atween yourselves, just like a couple of nob ought for to do."

"Very well, I'll go with you," said Montgomery, decidedly. He had little fear of danger. In the full possession of health, and blessed with a strength that few men are gifted with, he was reckless of personal peril. Besides he had faith that the fellow had spoken the truth and could conduct him to the retreat of the man who had fled with his money. And once face to face with the banker, he had little doubt about being able to compel him to disgorge some of his ill-gotten gains.

"You see, your honor, I've a-been a-waitin' around the station for to see some nob as had an interest in this cove wot is a-keepin' shady, an' when I heerd you a-talkin' with the de-tective, I said to myself, says I, that's my nob."

"Go on and I'll follow. Is it far?"

"Oh, no; in Baxter street, jist t'other side of Leonard."

"We'd better go down Broadway, then through Leonard," Montgomery said.

"Bless my eyes! if you ain't hit it ag'in!" cried "The Mouse," in great admiration. "That's the werry road."

Then Montgomery followed the skulking fellow, who had called himself, "Honest Tom, the Mouse."

The two proceeded down Broadway. As they passed the Metropolitan they attracted the attention of a small-sized, roughly-dressed man, who stood by the entrance to Niblo's Garden, sucking a quill toothpick.

"Well, I never!" cried the toothpick man. "If it don't just rain 'birds' to-day; one this afternoon and now another to-night! I ought to have an umbrella or I'll get drowned with 'em. I'll take a look arter you, my beauty, as the whale said to Jonah when he swallowed him."

Then the toothpick man followed, quietly, in the footsteps of "The Mouse" and Montgomery.

"The Mouse" led the way to a little wooden house in Baxter street, some ten doors from the corner of Leonard.

He opened the door and entered. Montgomery followed.

The guide led the way through a dark entry-way and opened the door of a dingy-looking room, apparently without windows and lit up by a single candle burning upon a small table at one side of the room.

"Sit down, your honor," said "The Mouse," bringing a dirty wooden chair and placing it in the center of the room. "You see, I've got to see my partner an' tell him that the job is put up, quite co-rect. I'll be back in a minit."

And with this, the man left the room.

Montgomery glanced around him. The aspect was evil enough, but he had no thought of fear.

In a few moments "The Mouse" returned.

"It's all right, your honor; the job is put up," said "The Mouse," with a grin.

"Is he coming?"

"Yes. Patsey!"

Suddenly the floor under Montgomery gave way. He was entrapped. He felt himself falling, he knew not where.

CHAPTER X.

BENDING STEEL.

"A COUNTESS?" said Leone, in astonishment.

"Exactly; a countess," repeated O'Connell, slowly.

"Are you jesting with me?" she asked.

"Oh, no; far from it. I only ask you a simple question. How would you like to be a countess?"

"I can not answer the question until I know the reason why you put it," replied Leone, who was utterly at a loss to account for the strange words of her visitor.

"What has your past life been?" asked O'Connell, suddenly.

"You know as well as I," Leone answered, bitterly.

"True, I do. Shall I speak of the past?"

"As you please," said the girl, quietly and coldly.

"A life of misery."

"Very true," Leone said, sadly.

"And that misery accompanied by—shall I say by crime?" the young man asked, fixing his keen eyes upon the pale face of the girl.

"Say what you like; you know the truth," replied Leone, tear-drops appearing in her great, lustrous eyes.

"We'll waive the question and not discuss it," said O'Connell, carelessly. "We'll come to the present. What are you now?"

"A most wretched woman!" and the young girl buried her face in her hands as she spoke.

O'Connell watched her, silently, for a moment; an odd, stern smile upon his features. He noted the suppressed sobs of the girl; saw her slight form quiver as she struggled to keep back the emotion that swelled within her breast. There was no pity in the face of the man as he looked upon the anguish of the young girl. No mercy in his cold smile.

"I have no doubt that you are quite right," he said, coldly, breaking the silence, "but I did not speak of your mental condition but as to your position in the world."

"You wish me to answer you?" she asked, raising her head and showing the tear-drops shining in the dark eyes.

"Yes, of course; else I should not have asked the question."

"I am a music-teacher, gaining my bread honestly—"

"And exposed to all sorts of insults," he interrupted.

"Yes, you are right, I am."

"Because you are beautiful. Few girls in all this great city, Leone, are half as beautiful as you. You work hard, yet it is a constant struggle to keep the wolf from the door, is it not?"

"Yes, and you know the reason why?" exclaimed the girl, a flash of indignation passing across her pale face.

"Yes; I believe I do borrow a little of your spare cash once in a while, when the goddess Fortune refuses to smile upon me and the courtly gentleman rakes in my money at the faro-table," O'Connell said, coolly. "But I intend to pay you all up sometime."

"Sometime!"

"Yes, when my ships come in."

"Your ships?"

"Of course. Don't you know, Leone, that every one in this world has ships sailing on the broad ocean of time? Ships freighted with golden sands, diamonds from Golconda, and rich spices from far-off Ind, the land of Prester John? Contrary winds—blasts of adversity—keep these precious argosies from us—blow them off the coast even when they are within sight, and about to enter the haven of safety. We can even see them—see the sinking sun gleam on the masts of beaten gold and playing in lines of rippling light on the shimmering sails of silk; then comes the blast, and darkness hides the bark from our sight. A man becomes suddenly rich, Leone; his ships have come in. Few men in this world, my girl, that in their day-dreams have not visions of the ships that may come to port at any moment and make them wealthy men."

"And your ship?" questioned the girl, who suspected that he concealed some special meaning in his fanciful words.

"Are coming in!" he cried gayly, "and here, behold! the first installment of the cargo."

Then he drew from his pocket-book two checks, and laid them in the lap of the girl.

"Atlantic bank—three thousand dollars. First National—three thousand dollars, payable to Lionel O'Connell or order!" exclaimed the girl, in amazement, as she examined the drafts.

"Exactly, making six thousand dollars in all!" said O'Connell, in a tone of triumph.

"Why, this is a small fortune!"

"Nothing to what I will have, before I'm a year older," said O'Connell, in a tone of settled conviction.

"Have you again stained your soul with a crime?" asked the girl with a shudder.

"Hush! how dare you!" cried O'Connell, springing to his feet, in anger. "Walls have ears! be careful for your own sake, if not for mine. Foolish girl, why do you speak of the past? Let it bury its dead, and don't dig them up again."

He paced the room for a few minutes, biting his nails, nervously, then he cooled down and again resumed his seat.

"Leone, there's a brilliant future before you. No longer a poor music-teacher, dependent upon the caprices of others, but you shall be a very queen. Leone, you are a beautiful woman; diamonds will shine with double luster in contrast to

that glossy, ebon hair. You shall have diamonds, every thing—almost—in this world that you wish for. Come, isn't the prospect a bright one?"

"And the price that I am to pay for all this?" asked Leone, slowly, a strange light gleaming in her eyes.

"Price?" said O'Connell, in some confusion.

"Yes, I am not a fool, Lionel; it does not do credit to your usual judgment that you take me for one. You paint a brilliant future, and to enjoy that future I shall have to pay a costly price. Deal with me fairly; you will find it better in the end."

For a moment O'Connell watched the cold, impassive face of the girl.

"By Jove! Leone; I believe that you are right!" he cried, suddenly. "I will deal fairly with you. I am going to take you from this miserable hole and place you in one of the first-class up-town hotels. Give the world to understand that you are the daughter of a French count who has been killed in the war. You are without relatives and have sought a home in this country. Your mother was an English lady, hence the ease with which you speak English. As for the French, you know that there are few better French scholars than you. You shall have plenty of money to assist you in carrying out the deception."

"But the object of all this?" asked the girl; "you have some object, of course."

"Yes—" then O'Connell paused; the explanation was not so easy as he had imagined.

"Well, I am waiting," Leone said, watching O'Connell's face, keenly, with her brilliant eyes as she spoke.

"There is in New York a certain man who has three enemies. These three wish to ruin this man—"

"And they call upon me to aid them?" interrupted Leone, coldly.

"Exactly!" cried O'Connell. "A clear head, that little one of yours, Leone."

"And I am to play the part of the siren and lure this man to destruction?"

"Right again."

"Who is he?"

"He is called Angus Montgomery!"

The girl started; the warm blood flushed her cheeks. O'Connell looked at her in astonishment.

"What! you know this Montgomery, then?" he asked.

"Yes," Leone replied, sinking her head upon her bosom in confusion.

"Where the deuce did you ever meet him?"

"I do not know him, but I have seen him," the girl replied, in some confusion.

"Where?"

"He visits Miss Chauncy's, where I teach. When I have been giving Miss Agatha her music lesson in the back-parlor, he has been in the front one, conversing with Miss Frances," Leone answered.

"He is engaged to Miss Frances." And O'Connell, watching Leone's face intently, saw an expression of anguish pass over it. A peculiar smile curled his lip as he saw the look.

"And she doesn't love him in the least, but only marries him for his money. Now it would really be an act of mercy to deprive him of his wealth, and thus save him from a woman who will—beyond the shadow of a doubt—make all his future life wretched."

"Yes, for the woman who does not love a man can not wrong him greater than to marry him," Leone said, slowly.

"Truth, every word, Leone. Now you know how you are to pay for the comfort—nay luxury—of the future. Of course you consent," O'Connell spoke carelessly.

"No, I do not," Leone replied, firmly.

"You do not consent?"

"No; on the contrary, I most decidedly refuse."

"And why?"

"I—I do not wish to tell you," she replied, in confusion.

"Leone, you must tell me!" O'Connell exclaimed, his face clouding up, and an evil light shining in his eyes.

"I will not!" answered the girl, firmly.

"Then I will tell you," O'Connell said, meaningly.

Leone looked at him in astonishment.

"You do not know," she said.

"True; but I can make a shrewd guess, even if I am not a Yankee. You love Angus Montgomery!"

The girl started; again the look of pain came over her pale features.

"Do not attempt to deny it. I am sure that it is the truth," he continued. "Your face is like an open book to

me, and in that book I have read your secret. You love this man, whose station is so far above yours, that to hope to win him would be almost as foolish as to hope to pluck one of the stars from the sky. And now, see what I offer you! The chance to win the love of the man whom, doubtless—for I know your fiery nature—you love better than you do your own life."

"Yes, that is true, for I would willingly risk my own life to save him from peril!" cried Leone, quickly. "He inspires love without knowing it. The younger sister of Frances Chauncy, Agatha, loves him with all the passion of her nature, yet I do not think that he even dreams that she loves him."

"Come, accept my offer; ruin this man, and then you can have him all to yourself," said O'Connell, coolly.

"I will not," returned the girl, almost fiercely.

"You will do nothing else!" exclaimed O'Connell, a lurking devil shining in his eyes.

"What do you mean?" Leone's blood was up, sparkled in her eyes and flushed her pale cheek.

"Why, that I will force you to do my will," replied O'Connell, sternly. "Foolish girl, do you forget the bond that binds us together—the bond of blood?"

Leone's head sunk at his words.

"Shall I call back the memory of the past?" he continued, fiercely, "call back the scene that made you my slave?"

"No, no!" almost shrieked the girl, again hiding her face in her hands.

"Then do my will—you must—you shall! I know the strength of the bond between us, and if you do not, you shall learn it."

"Oh, spare me!" moaned the girl.

"No, you will find no mercy in me," replied O'Connell, sternly. "Consent; brave me, if you dare!"

"I do not," the girl cried, in agony.

"You consent?"

"Yes, I will do your will."

CHAPTER XI.

THE DORG-FANCIER.

THAT he was the victim of a terrible plot flashed instantly into Montgomery's mind.

Small time had he for thought.

Involuntarily he thrust out his arms, and catching the sides of the trap with his hands, he held himself suspended over the dark gulf.

Little chance had he for escape, however, for "honest Tom, the Mouse," approached Montgomery with a huge club, that he had kept concealed behind him, and raised it high in air to dash it down upon the head of his victim.

With a desperate effort Montgomery strove to raise himself from the trap and escape the blow, which seemed destined to crush him, a stunned and bleeding mass, to the bottom of the dark pit.

But Angus Montgomery was *not* fated to meet his death at the hands of "The Mouse."

A new-comer upon the scene changed the aspect of affairs.

Through a little window in one side of the room a man dashed into the apartment, revolver in hand.

One look "The Mouse" gave at the man who had so unceremoniously entered the room, and then, with a howl of rage, the rough dropped the club and disappeared through the door by which he had entered.

"Though lost to sight, to memory dear!" cried the stranger, striking a tragic attitude in the center of the apartment, and gazing after the fleet-footed "Mouse" with a regretful expression upon his face.

Montgomery swung himself clear of the trap and gained his feet again.

"And he never left me a lock of his hair!" continued the stranger, who was the man with the quill toothpick, who had followed "The Mouse" and Montgomery down Broadway.

"I believe I owe you my life!" exclaimed Montgomery, gazing with horror at the dark opening in the rotten floor, that had so nearly proved a grave to him.

"Don't mention it; these little accidents *will* happen in the best of families," said the man, coolly.

"Accident?" cried Montgomery! "the infernal villain planned my death!"

"He is quite capable of it. Oh! he's a sly one, he is!"

"How did it happen that you came so aptly to my assistance?" asked Montgomery.

"Well, you see, it's just like a story in one of the picture-books. I saw you and this tidy young man—who never stopped for to shake with me—such ingratitude!—a-going down Broadway. I had a sort of curiosity to know *where* you were going and so I followed on a-hind. When you entered these gay and festive halls—this scene of dazzling light—represented by that 'ere penny dip, I saw how the cat jumped and I just came in after you. Luckily for you, sir, the front room was empty and a little window looked from that room into this one. It was werry neatly done—quite a surprise party," and he chuckled quietly to himself.

"You thought that I had walked into a trap then?"

"A reg'lar one and no mistake; he's a rum 'un, that 'Mouse' is. What he ain't up to, ain't worth knowing," said the man, reflectively.

"My banker absconded, recently, with quite a large amount of my money. This fellow offered to conduct me to his hiding-place. I fell into the snare—depending upon my strength to keep me from danger—and unhesitatingly accompanied him. I can hardly understand the motive for the attack, unless it was for the purpose of robbery, and I have very few valuables about me."

"Handsome ticker that of yours," said the man, pointing, "or leastways I judge so from the looks of the chain."

"Watch and chain are worth two-fifty," Montgomery replied.

"Why, bless your innocence! there's roughs 'round here that would take your life for a five-dollar note, and if they were a little drunk, they'd do it for a glass of whisky."

"I suppose we had better get out of this. This fellow may return with assistance," Montgomery said.

"Oh, there ain't any danger," replied the stranger, coolly. "'The Mouse' won't come back 'cos he's 'wanted,' and he ain't going to be 'jugged,' if he knows it."

"Wanted?" said Montgomery in wonder.

"Yes, some blue-coated gents are anxious to make his acquaintance."

"Oh, I understand—the police."

"Exactly."

"Are you one of the Metropolitan detectives then?"

"Well, now, I never!" said the man, in wonder. "Do I look like one of them fellows? I wouldn't have thought it."

"I supposed so by the sudden flight of this ruffian at your appearance."

"You know what the poet says, 'the feller wot prigs, doth fear each—what-d'ye call-it—an officer!' Them ain't exactly the words, but them's the ideas," spouted the stranger, in theatrical style.

"Very true."

Then the stranger led the way into the street.

"I beg parding, but if you are going up Broadway, I'll walk along with you as far as the Metropolitan," the stranger said.

"Certainly," Montgomery replied.

Then the two proceeded onward.

"By the way, I should like to offer you something for this service, if you won't feel offended, for I am sure that I owe you my life," Montgomery said, slowly.

A true gentleman, he feared to wound the pride of his unknown preserver; for every man hath his pride, be his condition in life what it may.

"Well, I don't know," said the stranger, reflectively, "I s'pose I have done you a leetle service, but you sees my ideas are that we're put in the world for to help one another. Now, maybe, I'll get in a fix one of these days; s'pose I comes to you and says I want a 'elping hand, will you give it to me?"

"You may depend upon that!" cried Montgomery, impulsively.

"And now if you care for to stand a glass of beer I don't cares if I looks at you," said the stranger, with a good-natured smile.

Montgomery instantly signified his assent to the idea.

They dropped into a lunch-room, convenient, procured their ale and then again proceeded on their way.

"You are not in need of money, then?" Montgomery asked, with a side glance at the rather seedy dress of his companion.

"No, thank ye," replied the stranger. "By the way, how may I call your name?"

"Angus Montgomery," replied the young man; "here's

my card." Then he penciled his address on it, "and that is my residence."

"I shan't lose it," said the stranger, stowing it away carefully in a greasy wallet, much the worse for wear, that he drew from his pocket.

"And your name?"

"Christopher Pipgan; I'm a dorg-fancier," the stranger replied, with a grin.

"A dog-fancier?"

"Yes, I deals in all kinds of dorgs; perhaps you want to buy a dorg?"

"No, thank you," Montgomery replied.

"I don't have any particular place to hang out; I lives round in spots," and Mr. Pipgan grinned, good-naturedly, as he made the candid confession.

A sudden thought occurred to Montgomery.

"How would you like to enter my service?" he asked, "not as a servant but as a sort of a steward—a confidential man to look after my interests?" Montgomery had taken a great fancy to the unknown who had come so timely to his rescue.

"I can't do it—much obliged to you for the offer," Mr. Pipgan said, with a solemn shake of the head. "It wouldn't suit me. I likes my liberty too well. But, if you ever happen to need the services of a man that you can depend on, you can reach me by a note left at 'The Grapes' in Houston street."

"You mean the little English ale saloon near Crosby?"

"Yes, and I am generally in there 'bout noon to get a drop."

"You are English, then?"

"A reg'lar Londoner—Bow Bells and all that sort of thing, you know," said Pipgan.

By this time they had reached the Metropolitan.

"Here I stop," said the Englishman, halting.

"Good-night, then," and Montgomery extended his hand to the other. "Mind, if you want a friend come to me."

"Thank ye, and if you need any assistance, don't forget Cris Pipgan, as my pals used to call me across the water," replied the Englishman, and so the two parted.

"A reg'lar out-and-outer! true-blue and no mistake!" exclaimed the Englishman, as he watched the tall form of Montgomery, until it was lost in the crowd—hastening along the pavement. "Well, now if this ain't been a wonderful day for meeting old friends, I'm a Dutchman and don't know what 'blue ruin' means! Let's figure up on the day. First and foremost I meets my dashy nob—whose hair used to be dark-brown and is now a beautiful golden, quite lovely for to behold—if I hain't made a mistake in the man. Pip—old boy! bet you ten to one, you hain't! I dodges him to a house in Tenth street and I waits outside three mortal hours afore my bird puts in an appearance. Then he goes to a brown-stone house on Twenty-third street where they keep a first-class menagerie, consisting of a lively tiger—whose claws are awful to behold when he sees a roll of greenbacks. Then I quietly and scientifically pumps a youth who sells papers at the corner, and as he happens to know my bird, I gets a full account of him. So far, all is serene. I can put my fingers on him when I wants to. Then bird, number two, flies up, but he's only a snipe, while the other's a pheasant. A dorg-man! blessed if I ain't a bird-man, too!" And with this reflection, Mr. Pipgan resumed his former station in front of the hotel.

Montgomery walked slowly along up Broadway. He was just beginning to realize what a terrible danger he had escaped.

"By Jove! I was within an ace of death!" he exclaimed.

Then two ladies coming down Broadway caught his eye.

One was Miss Agatha Chauncy, a younger sister to Frances, and the other her aunt, Mrs. Severn, an elderly lady, who took charge of the Chauncy household.

Agatha was a tall girl, just eighteen years of age. She was a complete contrast to Frances, having dark eyes and dark hair, but she was fully as beautiful as her sister.

Montgomery was somewhat astonished at seeing Agatha, as he believed her to be at Newport.

"I came away in the same train that you took. I saw you when you got into the smoking-car," she explained.

"And Frances?" he asked.

"She will be here to night."

A few more words and the two ladies passed.

"What a deuced pretty girl Agatha is," Montgomery mused to himself, as he walked on up the street, "and what splendid eyes she has—black as jet! By Jove!" and the

young man started at the thought, "her eyes are exactly like the eyes of that mysterious White Witch. Her prediction comes near the truth. The first blow at my fortune has been struck, but—bah! it is an accident. Who can foretell the future?"

A wise question. Who can answer it?

CHAPTER XII.

ANOTHER BIRD FOR THE DORG-FANCIER.

A WEEK after Montgomery's arrival in New York, walking down Broadway one fine morning, he met Tulip Roche and Herman Stoll.

"Any news of Catlin?" Tulip asked.

"No; there isn't much doubt about his escape with the plunder," Montgomery replied.

"I heard that it was fifty thousand that he let you in for," Tulip said.

"No, only twenty; that's bad enough," said Montgomery, with a laugh.

"I suppose you've lost your faith in bankers, eh?" said Tulip, laughing.

"Well, yes, to a certain extent. I'm going to be my own banker hereafter," Montgomery answered.

Tulip and Stoll exchanged glances.

"That's a capital idea!" exclaimed Tulip; "how are you going to manage it?"

"Oh, simple enough. I ordered a small safe to-day that I intend to keep in my bed-chamber, and in that safe I intend to put all my bonds, etc."

Again Tulip and Stoll exchanged looks. This was valuable news for the conspirators.

"By the way, Montgomery, have you seen this new beauty who is dazzling the eyes of all the young bloods?" Tulip asked.

"No; who is she?"

"Pon my life, it's difficult to say!" exclaimed Stoll joining in the conversation; "there are so many reports about her. Within the last half-hour I have been informed that she is a Russian princess; a niece of the Emperor of Brazil; the daughter of an English earl; the first-cousin of the Mexican President; and a celebrated opera-singer from Italy."

"All wrong, I assure you, Stoll!" cried Tulip.

"Well, I only repeat what I have heard," he replied.

"What you say, Tulip, quite excites my curiosity," Montgomery said.

"She's enough to excite any one's curiosity!" cried Stoll quickly. "She is the prettiest woman that I have ever set eyes on, and I flatter myself that I know a pretty woman when I see one."

"Her diamonds, too, are magnificent!" Tulip observed.

"But who and what is she?"

"Well, I've told you several things that she is supposed to be; you can take your choice," Stoll said.

"But, Tulip, what is your information regarding this unknown beauty?"

"That she is a French countess; that is, the daughter of a French count who was killed at Saarbruck; one of the first victims of this Franco-German war—"

"My dear boy, you may depend upon it that you are decidedly wrong. Coleman himself told me, in strict confidence, that she was a Russian princess, and he promised me an introduction," interrupted Stoll.

"Why, it seems to me that this fair stranger has created quite an excitement," said Montgomery, who was addressing all his conversation to Tulip, and quietly ignoring the presence of the broker entirely.

"Oh! she is a beautiful girl—dresses splendidly and with such perfect taste. Her diamonds, too, are magnificent and set in such an odd fashion. Her ear-rings are two golden snakes coiled in a spiral and holding a single diamond in their mouths; while her breast-pin is a mass of golden snakes, all entwined around each other, and each snake holding a diamond in its jaws. Then her necklace is one large golden snake, the tail-fastening in the mouth, and curiously continued with flexible joints like the reptile itself. In the body of the snake are a multitude of little diamonds."

"Strange fancy for a lady's ornaments," said Montgomery.

"And her style of beauty is as odd and wondrous as her jewelry."

"But how did you procure all this information?" Montgomery asked.

"From O'Connel. In some way he heard of the arrival of this beautiful unknown, and, as a newspaper man, he made it his business to 'interview' the lady. To his astonishment, he discovered that she was an old acquaintance. He had met her at Paris. In some way—these newspaper writers, you know, manage to get acquainted with almost everybody—he was introduced to the old count, her father, some years ago. Of course the lady was delighted to meet a friend in this strange country. So, you see, O'Connel is first favorite."

"If I get half a chance, I will cut him out," said Stoll, stroking his beard. "I hate to serve a friend so, but all's fair when a pretty woman is in the case."

"Here comes O'Connel now," said Tulip, as he caught sight of the young Irishman advancing up the street.

"O'Connel!" Tulip called, as he came up.

"Ah! good-morning, gentlemen," O'Connel said, gayly; "what's the news?"

"Nothing particular. By the way, I see that you are 'got up' regardless of expense—rose in your button-hole, immaculate kids. Gentlemen, I lay ten to one that O'Connel is on his way to visit the fair Frenchwoman!" Tulip exclaimed.

"You'd win. I am bound for the Coleman House!" O'Connel said, laughing. "I promised to take Miss Leone for a drive through the Park this morning."

"Leone? A pretty name!" exclaimed Montgomery.

"Yes, and the woman that bears it is prettier far than the name; but I'd better take care how I praise her too much, or I shall have Montgomery, here, as mad after her as all the rest," O'Connel said, laughing.

"Not much danger of that. You forget, I have never seen the lady."

"Ah! then there's a pleasure in store for you," O'Connel said, quickly. "Come, I'll lay aside all jealousy and be your guardian-angel. If you will walk as far as the hotel with me, I'll give you an introduction."

Tulip and Stoll groaned in concert.

"You have never offered to introduce me!" exclaimed Tulip.

"Nor me!" added Stoll.

"All in good time; you shall have introductions both of you; *allons*."

And then Montgomery and O'Connel proceeded up the street.

Tulip and Stoll gazed after the two, a peculiar smile upon their features.

"He bites!" said the broker, coarsely.

"How could he resist when the temptation is a pretty woman?" asked Tulip.

"Women have always ruined men since the days of Adam," said Stoll, with a sneer.

"They have never ruined you."

"They would if I had ever cared for any of them," Stoll replied. "But, I'm no milksop. I never saw the woman yet that I couldn't forget when I wanted to."

"That is because you never have loved."

"Yes I have."

"Who?"

"Myself."

Tulip laughed. He knew that Stoll spoke the truth.

"By the way, did you hear what he said about keeping his valuables in his rooms?" asked Stoll.

"Yes."

"O'Connel must know about it. His crafty head will devise some means of getting at them."

"And Angus Montgomery will be much the poorer."

"Exactly," Stoll said, with a chuckle.

"This O'Connel evidently bears Montgomery a deadly hatred."

"Yes."

"What do you suppose is the reason of it?"

"Oh, the old gentleman down below only knows. But one thing we must be careful of," Stoll said, mysteriously.

"And what is that?" Tulip asked.

"This O'Connel is a deuced smart fellow."

"Yes."

"Sharp as a needle."

"Well, what of it?"

"We must look out that he isn't too smart for us," Stoll said, ambiguously.

"We three have signed a compact."

"Yes."

"I intend to keep it; do you?"

"Yes, of course."

"And the one who breaks it?"

"Death."

"O'Connel will keep faith with us or pay the penalty," said Tulip, slowly and significantly.

Then the two passed on down the street.

We will follow O'Connel and Montgomery.

"By the way," said Montgomery suddenly, "do you remember the last masquerade at Newport?"

"Yes, certainly," replied O'Connel.

"The night you wore the dress of the White Clown?"

"Yes; what of it?"

"What were you doing out on the balcony about ten o'clock?"

O'Connel could not repress a slight movement of astonishment.

"Why, how the deuce did you know that I was on the balcony?" he asked.

"I saw you through the window. Do you remember my telling you, about a mysterious woman, dressed all in white, who predicted that certain things would happen to me in the course of the year?" Montgomery asked.

"Yes, the White Witch; that was what she called herself, wasn't it?" O'Connel said. He spoke quietly and unconcerned, yet he felt that he was treading on dangerous ground.

"Yes; this strange woman told me certain things, and when I doubted the truth of her statements, she drew aside the curtain of the window and bade me look out upon the balcony and see for myself."

"And what did you see?" asked O'Connel, a peculiar smile appearing upon his face.

"You and two others; one dressed as a monk, and the other as a cavalier. You were on your knees, and I heard you say something about 'three drops of blood.'"

O'Connel burst into a loud laugh.

"And the woman said our positions would confirm her words?"

"Yes."

"By Jove!" and O'Connel laughed louder than before; "now, this is really too good; ha, ha, ha! Why, we were rehearsing for the tableau of the Duel in the Snow; you remember the picture. We're going to display it the first opportunity—the tableau, you know, not the picture."

"What an ass I have been!" cried Montgomery, annoyed.

"Oh, your White Witch is a humbug, clearly."

Then the two entered the Coleman House. The carriage ordered by O'Connel was standing in front of the hotel.

About an hour afterward, the two young men, escorting the beautiful girl known as the Countess of Epernay, but whom the reader knows better as Leone Basque, descended the hotel steps and entered the open carriage in waiting.

A man sauntering, slowly, along on the other side of the street, caught sight of the little party of three and paused in utter amazement.

The quill tooth-pick dropped from his mouth to the pavement unheeded.

His gaze was fixed on the face of Leone. He stared as though the fair girl was a spirit risen from the grave, rather than one of earthly mold.

The man was thoroughly astonished.

"Jigger my buttons!" he cried, "it is! maybe it isn't! If it is—what then? Who knows?"

CHAPTER XIII.

IN THE NET.

"Well, I'm blest!" muttered Pipgan, as he watched the carriage drive off. "If this 'ere ain't miraculous—wonderful for to behald! Why, these familiar faces makes me think that I'm across the water. Shall I follow them?"

A moment he pondered on the question.

"What's the use?" he said, reflectively. "The girl, evidently, lives in that hotel, so I know where to find her if I want her; and as for the dashy nob with the golden hair—blessed if that hair-dyeing ain't a brilliant ideal—I know

where to find him if I want him. But, do I want him? That's a question that I can't answer just now. I shall have to use the ocean cable to find out. I might as well inquire a little as to who this girl is—what tack she's sailing on now, as a nautical man would say. Just to think of my coming to this 'blasted country, you know,' for to enjoy myself a bit, and getting right into business."

Then Mr. Pipgan missed his toothpick.

"Another quill gone!" he muttered, as his eyes found it on the pavement. "That's the second one that this 'ere party has cost me."

He supplied himself with a fresh toothpick from his pocket and then crossed the street to the hotel. He waylaid the colored gentleman in charge of the door, and within fifteen minutes had the full history of the "Countess of Epernay."

Then he resumed his stroll up Broadway.

The carriage containing the countess, Montgomery and Lionel drove up the street.

The young New Yorker found a strange fascination in the face of the beautiful girl.

The few minutes that he passed with her in conversation in the hotel revealed to him that she was not only a beautiful but an accomplished woman.

There was a nameless charm about her that he could not understand; a subtle witchery in her face and voice that won upon him.

The countess and Montgomery had entered the carriage first, while O'Connel on the pavement had given some whispered instructions to the driver, then had taken his place beside Montgomery.

The young New Yorker little guessed the trap that the wily O'Connel had laid for him, or the terrible consequences that would ensue from that simple pleasure excursion.

Busy in conversation with Leone, Montgomery did not notice the route that the carriage had taken until an observation of O'Connel's caused him to raise his eyes.

"There's Miss Chauncy," O'Connel said.

A slight flush mantled Montgomery's cheek, as he looked up and caught the eyes of Frances.

She was sitting at a parlor window and a look of astonishment swept over her fair face as she beheld her lover in the company of a young and beautiful girl. A little touch of anger was in the soft, blue eyes of the blonde beauty.

Montgomery was annoyed at the occurrence, though he felt sure that Frances would accept his explanation; yet there was a look upon the face of his betrothed bride that he did not like. It seemed to him like the little black cloud that rises in the summer sky—the warning of the thunder-storm.

The quick eye of O'Connel noted the flush of anger—slight as it was—upon the face of the girl and the look of annoyance that clouded Montgomery's brow. His scheme had succeeded. He had given the driver of the carriage instructions to drive up the avenue, and to drive slowly. His idea was, that, in passing the Chauncy mansion, some of the household might see them and report to Frances that Montgomery had driven past in company with a lady. Fortune had crowned his hope, for the girl with her own eyes had beheld the fact.

True, there was nothing absolutely wrong in Montgomery's situation, for a third party—O'Connel—was present. But as the bard of Avon wrote, "trifles light as air are to the jealous, confirmations strong as proofs of holy writ."

The subtle mind of the chief of the League of Three had kindled the spark, the other members of the brotherhood must fan it into a blaze.

Seeing Frances at the window about spoilt all the pleasure of the drive for Montgomery. Yet there were moments when, amid the winding roads of the Park, secluded as it were from the world, in gazing into the dark, lustrous eyes of the beautiful stranger—eyes which seemed to beam with a softer light when they looked upon him—he forgot the memory of Frances Chauncy.

The drive over, the party returned to the hotel.

Montgomery and O'Connel made their adieus to the countess.

Politely, she pressed them to call again. Montgomery fancied that her request was addressed more to him than to his companion, and that her eyes said more than her words.

But, as a rule, nearly all young men are vain in the presence of a pretty woman; perhaps Montgomery was not an exception to the rule.

"By the way," said O'Connel, as they descended to the street, "did you notice that Miss Chauncy didn't look as amiable as usual to-day?"

"Do you think so?" Montgomery answered, evading the question.

"Well, yes. It struck me that way. I only gave her a casual glance, though, as we passed; perhaps I am wrong."

"I never saw her out of sorts," Montgomery said. "I don't believe that she could get angry if she tried to; she is very amiable."

He was vainly fighting against what his heart told him was truth. He was sure that Frances was displeased.

"What does 'Iago' in the play say about 'belles in their parlors, devils in their kitchens?'" said O'Connel, shrewdly.

"That's nonsense, as far as Miss Chauncy is concerned," said Montgomery. "A better girl never lived."

"Yes; I believe some wise man once said that all women are angels until they were proved to be—the contrary," O'Connel replied, with latent sarcasm in his tone.

"Wise men say very stupid things, sometimes," Montgomery said, dryly.

"That's very true. Well, I'm off down-town; which way are you going?"

"Up," Montgomery replied.

"Allons, then."

And so the two parted.

To speak truth, Montgomery felt any thing but comfortable, as he walked up the street.

"I have been a fool!" he muttered, with a clouded brow, "yet I haven't really done any thing wrong. Bah! a man can not deceive himself, and why should I attempt the fruitless task? This girl is beautiful—very beautiful, and she has cast a charm over me that I can not account for. I love Frances Chauncy with all my heart—have given her all the love that is in my nature; that is, I think I have; and yet I can not but confess that I am half in love with this stranger, an acquaintance of an hour. A man can't very well love two women, though I don't know why I should come to that conclusion, when I know that some of my companions are in love with half a dozen, all at the same time. But that is not the pure, the genuine love that sways all the inner life of a man. But do I love Frances Chauncy with such a love? I believed that I did; but now that this dark-eyed beauty with her witching smile has come across my path, I—I begin to believe that I do not know my own mind. I must shake off the strange fascination that this woman has thrown around me. I'll see Frances this afternoon. In the pure light of her eyes this dangerous glamour of the other will vanish."

These broken sentences came one by one into the mind of the young man as he walked slowly up the street.

He felt that he was under the influence of a spell—a fatal charm that seemed to bind his better nature.

The wild intoxication of passion was slowly stealing over him. Desperately, he fought against the potent power that binds in iron bonds one-half the world.

As Montgomery went up the street, O'Connel, smiling over the success of his scheme, went down Broadway.

"She has fascinated him, already," he mused, as he walked on. "I could read it in his eyes. He was struck with her at the first glance. The star of Frances Chauncy pales its light before my comet! It was a clever device of mine to drive past the house of the fair blonde," and a smile of triumph lit up his face as he spoke. "Fortune, too, aided me. Frances at the window! I couldn't have wished for any thing better. She saw her lover drive past the house with a beautiful girl; one fully as pretty as she is. She is not the woman that I take her for if she is not jealous. And if she is jealous, she herself shall rend the bond that binds Montgomery to her. Of course he can easily explain the circumstance; but what woman ever listened to reason—especially if she was jealous?"

O'Connel paced onward with hasty steps. Ideas were thronging, quickly, upon his brain, and his stride took the cue from their speed.

"I must find either Stoll or Tulip," he muttered. "One of them—better Stoll, for I doubt if Tulip will be in the mood after his repulse—must call upon Miss Chauncy this afternoon; get there before Montgomery, and in the course of casual conversation contrive to tell her that it is all over town that Montgomery is desperately in love with this beautiful French girl. Aha!" and O'Connel laughed again. "Leone plays her part to perfection." Then his mind came back to his scheme. "With the information of her lover's madness after another woman in her mind, when Montgomery calls his reception will be any thing but a gracious one."

I think I know his nature pretty well. His pride is the strong point in his character. Let Frances offend that pride—which she will be pretty apt to do, for women are very free with their words when anger rules them—and every thing will be at an end between them. If she casts him off—wounds his pride—he will call her false and fickle—learn to despise her. Love will be replaced by contempt. A man can not love a woman that he thinks is unworthy of him. Then, desperate—for all men are desperate to a certain extent when disappointed in these matters of the heart—where will he seek consolation?"

O'Connel laughed, as he put the question to himself.

"Where would I seek it, or any other reasonable man? Why, in the love of the woman who does look kindly on my passion. Will he not do the same? He is only human with all his strength of mind. I've noticed as a fact in this world, the nobler the man—the greater his mental power and talent—the bigger fool he is where a woman is concerned. All great men have a great deal of the woman in their nature. Once he seeks her love, he falls like a blind fool into our power. The snare is carefully laid. He can not fail to be caught by it; and, once in the net, I'll warrant that he'll not break through the meshes."

O'Connel's lips were compressed firmly and the evil light was lurking in his eyes as he thought of the triumph in the future.

"Even this mysterious White Witch, who seems by accident—for it can not be aught else—to have hit upon my very plan, can not save him. I'd give a trifle to know who the White Witch is! but—bah! it was only a masquerading joke; by chance she hit on something that seemed like my ideas."

Then O'Connel saw Tulip and Stoll standing in front of the Fifth Avenue Hotel.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE THREE IN COUNCIL.

TULIP and Stoll greeted the chief of the League with a look of inquiry as he joined them.

"All goes on well," said O'Connel, in response to the look.

"You have introduced him to the lady?" Tulip asked.

"More than that. He has not only made the acquaintance of the fair countess, but he has rode about the Park by her side for over an hour," O'Connel replied, with a look of triumph.

"You have pushed matters, then," Stoll said with a coarse laugh.

"The game we are playing is a difficult one; we can neither afford to lose a trick nor to hesitate in our play," replied O'Connel, gravely.

"So far you have succeeded," Tulip said.

"Yes beyond my hopes. Montgomery has not only made the acquaintance of the siren who is to lure him to ruin, but he has been fascinated by her."

"By Jove!" cried Stoll, exultingly, "the beginning is beautiful."

Tulip showed no signs of joy upon his thoughtful face. Farther-sighted than his companion, he knew, full well, that the first trick does not decide the fate of the game.

"He has been attracted by the beauty of our siren?" Tulip said.

"Yes; but more, I think, by her conversation and manners even than her beauty. Our siren is not only a beautiful woman, but an accomplished lady. There is a nameless grace about her—a subtle charm—that affects even me, sometimes, and yet I have known her for years," replied O'Connel.

"She has charmed—fascinated him?"

"Yes," and he proceeded to relate the events of their ride and to explain his further plans for alienating Montgomery and Frances Chauncy.

The other two listened, eagerly.

"One of you—or both—must call upon Miss Chauncy this afternoon. In the course of conversation, continue to speak of Montgomery. Say that you saw him driving in the Park with this girl; hint that it is whispered about that he is desperately in love with her; that it is a common rumor that he has offered to marry her, and that bets have even been made at the clubs as to whether she will accept or refuse his offer.

Tulip's eyes sparkled as O'Connel developed the scheme that was to separate two loving hearts.

Stoll listened with wonder. His dull brain could never have framed so clever a device; yet he easily perceived how likely it was to succeed.

"A glorious idea!" exclaimed Tulip, warmly.

"It will separate them, beyond a doubt," Stoll added.

"I think so, then in anger he will seek consolation in the smiles of our siren."

"By the way, O'Connel, who is this pretty girl?" asked Stoll, bluntly.

"Why, the Countess of Epernay—"

"Yes, yes; I know that's what she calls herself; but, who is she, really?" asked Stoll, interrupting O'Connel.

"A young French girl, by name, Leone Epernay, and the daughter of a French count who was killed in the fight at Saarbruck, in the first of this Franco-German war," said O'Connel, coolly.

"Why, you don't mean to say that she is really—"

"What she represents herself to be?—exactly," said O'Connel, breaking in upon the speech of the other.

"Well, but I don't understand," said Stoll, in blank amazement.

"Don't understand what?"

"Why, how is it that she is willing to act as our agent in this matter?"

"Ah, that's a secret," returned O'Connel, evasively. "The girl is not rich, of course; for it is the money of the League of Three that supports her in the style in which she lives. But she does not do my will for money."

"What for, then?"

"My dear Stoll, you do ask terrible questions; and the worst of it is, that I can't answer them," said O'Connel, pleasantly.

"You can if you want to?" Stoll returned, bluntly.

"Exactly! but it happens that I don't want to," and O'Connel laughed in the face of the broker.

"Well, she is a deuced pretty woman. I suppose, as she is living on our money, it won't be any harm if I take a fancy to make love to her?" Stoll said, coarsely, and with a wink to Tulip.

"Yes, there is one objection," O'Connel replied, quietly.

"And that is?"

"Myself."

"Eh?" and Stoll looked astonished.

"This lady that we speak of, to please me, has condescended to act the part of a lure, to entrap the bird whose wings we wish to clip; yet, as surely as I stand here, so surely would I kill the man—save one alone—who should dare to speak of love to her." The tone of O'Connel was icy cold, no trace of passion, and yet both his hearers felt sure that he would keep his word, should the event happen that he alluded to.

"I suppose the one man is yourself, eh?" Stoll said, after a few moments' silence.

"Perhaps so," replied O'Connel, carelessly.

"We had better make an early call on Miss Chauncy, so as to get there before Montgomery," said Tulip, changing the subject. "If once he has a chance to explain his reason for riding with this stranger, we will have a difficult task in inflaming the girl against him."

"That is a good thought!" exclaimed O'Connel, quickly.

"By the way, we got a little information out of Montgomery this morning that may prove useful to us," said Stoll.

"What is it?" asked O'Connel.

"Since the abrupt departure of Catlin, his banker, he has lost faith in the Wall street gentlemen, and hereafter, he says, he is going to keep his bonds and like valuables in a safe in his own room."

"That is information, indeed!" cried O'Connel, quickly.

"A safe in his own room?" and for a moment O'Connel was silent, apparently in deep thought. "If he should be robbed some fine night it would be a heavy blow," he said, breaking the silence.

The three looked at each other.

"Can it be done?" asked Stoll, mysteriously.

"When three determined men, with plenty of money, set about accomplishing any possible object, the chances are ten to one that they will succeed," replied O'Connel, ambiguously.

"He must have quite a sum in Government bonds; or, at least, I know that he did have," said Tulip.

"I'll think it over. First, we'll detach him from this avenue belle; then, our next blow will be at his money," O'Connel said, quietly.

"We'll call upon Miss Chauncy about two," Tulip said.

"You will call, then?" O'Connell asked, with a side glance into the face of the young man.

"Yes," Tulip replied, and as he spoke, he detected the look of the other, and a slight flush tinged his cheeks.

"I'll meet you here, then, about three," O'Connell said, and then they departed.

"Poor, silly moth!" muttered O'Connell, as he watched the two proceed up the street; "he flutters around the garish flame, hoping against hope. Ah, Tulip Roche, Frances Chauncy is not for you! Another has marked her for his own, and the chances are that he will win her." Then, for moment, he was silent. Busy thoughts were in his brain.

"By Jove!" he cried, suddenly, "in all my desperate ventures never have I had such smooth sailing as this has been. If my course lies through the reefs and amid the tempest, it is, seemingly, far in the future."

Leaving O'Connell to his meditations, we will follow Tulip and Stoll.

"What a deuced mystery to make about this girl," grumbled Stoll.

"I saw by his eye, the moment you spoke, that you had touched upon a delicate subject," said Tulip.

"What do you suppose is the nature of the tie between them?"

"He is either her lover or she is his wife," replied Tulip. "I guessed one of the two the moment I saw the girl."

"And that is the reason that she is willing to perform this service for him?"

"Yes."

"But, why does he make a mystery out of it?"

"That's hard to say," replied Tulip, thoughtfully. "This O'Connell is a strange fellow; not an ordinary man in any sense of the word. He, himself, is a mystery. We have known him some time, Herman, yet what do we know of him?"

"Nothing!" answered Stoll, after thinking for a moment.

"Exactly; in saying 'nothing' you have only spoken the truth. We know that his name is Lionel O'Connell, or, at least, that he says it is. We have no proof that it is his name. And his occupation, a writer for the press; yet he is not known to be actually connected with any newspaper. Then, again, he always has plenty of money—"

"And I never saw one of these newspapers fellows that ever had any money, before," interrupted Stoll, in his coarse way.

"Well, I don't suppose that their salaries are very large, save in some few exceptional cases," Tulip said; "but this man, apparently, has plenty of money, and spends it as freely as if he were worth a million."

"I don't understand it!" Stoll exclaimed, with a shake of the head.

"Nor I," Tulip said. "This O'Connell has a wonderful way of getting his friends to tell him all about themselves, and yet he keeps his own history concealed. You never hear him speak of what he has done in the past."

"Never!"

"He's a strange fellow."

"A smart one, though. That idea of driving the carriage, with Montgomery and this French girl in it, past her house was a capital one."

"Yes, and it now rests with us to clench the nail he has driven," Tulip said.

"Well, what do you think about it?" asked Stoll, suddenly.

"About what?"

"Why, our plot. Is the League of Three going to accomplish the object that they aim at?"

"I think so," replied Tulip, quietly, but a gleam of fire was in his eyes as he spoke.

In imagination he saw Angus Montgomery, a broken man—ruined alike in fortune and in mind.

Even the day-dream of vengeance was sweet; what then would the reality be?

Such was the question that Tulip Roche asked himself.

Herman Stoll was not thinking of vengeance; his mind was filled with thoughts of the beautiful girl, who was called the Countess of Epernay.

The broker was trying to think of some plan by means of which he could discover who and what she really was. One of the League wished to stab the chief of the Three.

CHAPTER XV.

A TRANSPARENT LIE.

TULIP and Stoll went to lunch.

Then, lunch over, they took their way to the residence of Frances Chauncy.

"Don't you feel a slight reluctance to call upon this girl, after the way she has treated you?" asked Stoll, as they approached the house.

"No," replied Tulip, after hesitating for a moment, as if thinking the question over.

"Well, I don't know; I think I should."

"You don't understand my feelings," Tulip said, slowly.

"I love this girl as I have never loved any other woman. I do not think that she is to blame in the matter. Montgomery is one of those men whom the world calls fascinating. He has paid devoted attention to the girl. I do not think that she really knows her own mind. She does not understand what love really is—"

"My dear boy," interrupted Stoll, "I never saw a woman yet that did. They think that they love a fellow until another one comes along, and then they suddenly discover that they like Number Two better than Number One; then they like Number Three better than Number Two, and so on it goes, to the end of the chapter."

"My dear friend Stoll, I'm sadly afraid that your knowledge of woman is limited, or else you have been unfortunate in your acquaintance," said Tulip, dryly.

Their arrival at the Chauncy mansion put an end to the conversation.

Entering the house, they were ushered into the parlor.

In a few minutes Frances Chauncy stepped into the room.

The manner in which she greeted Tulip showed signs of embarrassment.

"We called, Miss Chauncy, to ask how you have been since your return to the city," said Stoll.

"Oh, quite well, thank you," replied Frances, with her sweetest smile.

If the blonde beauty was suffering from an attack of the heartache, one would never have guessed it by looking at her face.

Her round, baby-like features were as placid as ever. No traces of emotion could be detected in her full blue eyes.

"I should have called sooner, but I have been so very busy down town, getting my affairs in order," said Stoll.

"I expected you," Frances said, "and I have been really quite surprised that you, Mr. Roche—such a near neighbor, too—haven't called upon us before."

Woman-like, she was not content to let the man go whose suit she had repulsed. She wished him still to bow in homage at her shrine, although with her own lips she had told him that she was promised unto another.

It is so hard for some women to give up their old lovers, even when they are pledged to a new one.

"I beg ten thousand pardons for my neglect," said Tulip, quickly; "but I haven't, really, made a single call since I came back from Newport."

The man who said that a lover feeds on air, and, like the chameleon, changes his color at turn of the wind, uttered the truth.

The few simple words of Frances had kindled new hope in the breast of Tulip. He again hoped to win the woman who already had broken faith with him, as if she could be trusted a second time! But love is a madness that changes sensible men into idiots.

"Neither have I," said Frances. "I suppose, though, that the city and the people look about the same as usual."

"Oh, yes; quite the same," replied Stoll, whose conversational powers were not brilliant.

"Have you seen any of our friends lately?" asked Frances, carelessly.

The tone did not deceive Tulip; his wits were keen enough, except when love blinded his eyes.

He knew that Frances spoke in reference to Angus Montgomery when she put the apparently careless question.

"Yes," Tulip said. "I met Mr. Montgomery and Mr. O'Connell to-day. They were just going for a drive in the Park."

Frances' eyes were cast down upon the floor, and she tapped her little foot upon the carpet softly.

There was a question that she was very anxious to ask, and yet she did not know how to word it.

Stoll saved her the trouble.

"Did Montgomery and O'Connell have a lady with them when you saw them?" Stoll asked.

It was the question that Frances wished to put.

"Yes."

"Who was the lady?" Frances asked, and she did not raise her eyes from the carpet as she put the question.

"The Countess of Epernay."

"A countess!" and Frances raised her gaze from the floor in astonishment.

"Yes," Tulip answered. "She is the daughter of a French count who was killed in this war now raging in Europe. Of course she doesn't pretend to any title here. She is only plain Miss Epernay. I believe she intends to make her future home in this country."

"Yes, I've heard all about her!" exclaimed Stoll. "She is a most beautiful girl, and has turned the heads of all the young men."

"And who is the especial favorite—that is, if she has any?" asked Frances, coldly; yet there was a bright tinge of scarlet burning in her cheeks.

"Why, haven't you heard?" asked Stoll, apparently greatly astonished.

"No," replied Frances.

Then she looked at Tulip. His eyes were bent upon the floor, as if he wished to avoid her glance.

By Tulip's manner, Frances guessed the name that she was about to hear.

"Why, it's Montgomery, you know—Mr. Angus Montgomery," Stoll said. "They were out riding in the Park together to-day. Mr. O'Connell knew the lady in Paris, and he gave Montgomery the introduction."

Frances was conscious that her face was betraying her. She could not conceal her annoyance.

The little white teeth almost met in the scarlet lip, and their points were tinged with blood.

Stoll had glanced out of the window after he had finished his speech, and therefore her agitation escaped his notice, while Tulip kept his eyes fixed upon the floor, as if he did not wish to enjoy the triumph of hearing that the man who had supplanted him had now forsaken the treasure he had so easily won.

In her heart Frances Chauncy thanked Tulip for his consideration. She was grateful for his mercy.

One taunting look from him would have flushed her face with tears.

"I expect the wedding will be a grand affair," Stoll said, finding that no one spoke.

"The wedding!" Frances exclaimed, in a voice that trembled in spite of her efforts to appear unconcerned.

"Yes, of course—grand affair—you know—everybody is anxious for an invitation!" cried Stoll, glibly.

"Indeed!" and Frances elevated her eye-brows. She was beginning to get over the emotions that led to tears and experience those that led to anger.

"Yes, of course; it will be the wedding of the season. I expect Tulip, here, will be the bridegroom's best man."

"Is that possible, Tulip?" asked Frances.

Tulip nodded his head. He could not lie as easily as the broker; his education had not been finished in Wall street.

"Then there is no doubt about it?" Frances said.

"None in the world. She's a beautiful girl; lucky fellow, Montgomery, to secure such a treasure," said Stoll, who lied with ease and grace, the result of long experience in the Stock Exchange.

"When is the wedding to take place?" Frances' usually mild blue eyes were flashing with unwonted fire.

"Ah, I can't tell you that. In fact, I don't believe that it is fixed yet. Montgomery doesn't even wish that the fact of the engagement should be made public. Only a few of his friends know of it. Of course, when I said that everybody was anxious for an invitation, I meant everybody that knows about it. In truth, I believe that Montgomery denies the fact except to a few intimate friends, like Mr. Roche and myself. Of course, seeing what we have seen of his attention to the lady, he couldn't very well deceive us," and Stoll looked wise.

"It seems to me that it is very sudden," said Frances, thoughtfully.

"Oh, yes!" cried Stoll; "love at first sight, you know—over head and ears. Never saw a man so—if you'll pardon the expression—so spoony, in all my life!"

"I hope that he will be happy, for I have always like An—Mr. Montgomery, I mean," said Frances, vainly striving to appear calm.

"Of course," Stoll replied. "She'd like to put red-hot

coals in his wedding-bed, or stinging nettles or something else that would make them deuced uncomfortable," he mentally added.

"Come, Herman, we must be going," said Tulip, rising.

"Pray call again, gentlemen," Frances said, as she accompanied them to the hall.

"Of course—delighted," said Stoll, gallantly.

"And Tulip, you will not forget an old friend," Frances said, in a tone of entreaty, and she extended her hand to him.

Stoll was half-way down the steps, with his back discreetly turned.

"You wish me to come?"

"Yes," replied Frances, quickly and firmly, and her eyes said more than her tongue.

"I will come, then. Oh, Frances! if you'll only let me hope—" Tulip said, pleadingly.

"Don't speak of that now, please," Frances said, softly, a tear gleaming in her eye. "Good-by."

Then Tulip closed the door and Frances was alone with her sad thoughts.

Slowly she returned to the parlor.

An album on the center-table caught her eyes.

She opened it and from it took a picture. It was the likeness of Angus Montgomery.

All the anger of her nature was roused at the sight of the handsome face of the man who had proved false to her.

"Strange how familiar the face of that girl, who was with him in the carriage, was to me. She is the woman who has won the love—no not the love—" and her lip curled "but the fickle fancy of this man, whom I thought I loved. Now I hate him!"

Frances stamped her foot in anger, and her fair brow was wrinkled by many an ugly frown.

It was not strange that the face of the woman, known as the Countess of Epernay, was familiar to Frances. She had seen her many a time. But, she never guessed that the richly-dressed girl, attired in the height of fashion, who rode by the side of her lover, was the humble music-teacher, Leone Basque.

Silks and laces work wondrous change in this world, some times.

"And I have felt his kisses on my lips, and believed that he loved me. I have given up my lips to him, freely—kissed him as I have never kissed any one else. Oh! I could cry with shame and vexation when I think of it!"

Frances paced up and down the parlor, half in tears, half in anger.

Then she halted and looked again at the picture.

"I'll tear it to pieces!" she cried.

"No, Frances, don't do that; give it to me!" said Agatha Chauncy, who had just entered the room and overheard the words of her sister.

"You heard what I said?" asked Frances, with flaming eyes.

"Yes."

"Take his picture, then," and she tossed it contemptuously toward her. "I know why you wish it! I know your secret! You love Angus Montgomery!"

CHAPTER XVI.

"BREAKING IT OFF."

THE warm blood crimsoned Agatha's face at the accusation of her sister.

"I love Mr. Montgomery?" she said, slowly.

"Yes, you do!" cried Frances, quickly, and in angry tones.

"Do you think that I am blind? I am not, even if he is. I have seen it from the first."

"Frances, you do not know what you are saying," said Agatha, in confusion.

"Do I not?" exclaimed the blonde beauty, in scorn.

"Why should I love him?" asked the girl, vainly trying to appear calm.

"You can answer that question better than I can," replied Frances, disdainfully. "But, why do you attempt to conceal the truth from me? I know that you do love him—"

"Like a brother; yes, I acknowledge that," said Agatha, the tell-tale blood again flushing her cheeks, scarlet.

"Like a brother!" repeated Frances, scornfully; "he will never be your brother."

"Is he not to be your husband?" asked Agatha, in wonder.

"Never!" cried Frances, impetuously.

"Are you not engaged to be married to him?"

"That engagement is ended, or will be, the next time that we meet," said Frances.

"But why?"

It was now Frances' turn to be confused.

"I am not aware that I am obliged to answer your questions," said the girl, in anger.

"Oh, Frances, don't speak that way to me!" exclaimed Agatha, affected almost to tears.

"Then why do you question me? Can't you see that I am out of temper?" said Frances, pettishly.

"I did not know that you and Angus—I mean Mr. Montgomery"—and Agatha quickly corrected her speech—"had quarreled."

"There has been no quarrel between us. Agatha, I do not choose to give you, or any one else, my reasons for the step I am about to take. It is enough that my reasons are good," Frances said, firmly.

"This will be a sad blow to Mr. Montgomery, for I am sure that he loves you, dearly," Agatha said, slowly.

"Yes, and like all the rest of the 'lords of creation,' he loves three or four others at the same time."

"How can you say so?" exclaimed Agatha, quickly. "Oh, Frances, I am sure that he loves you, and you only."

"You are a child!" said Frances, contemptuously.

"Yes, I am *so much* younger than you," and on Agatha's face a slight smile appeared as she spoke.

"In worldly experience you are," retorted Frances quickly.

"But I don't know why I should talk with you about Mr. Montgomery. All is at an end between us. And now, you can bewitch him with your *little innocent* ways as soon as you like."

The contemptuous words of Frances stung Agatha to the quick.

"Why should you think that I care for Mr. Montgomery?" she asked. "Do you think so meanly of me as for a single instant to imagine that I have tried to attract the attention of a man, whom I knew to be your promised husband?"

For a moment Frances looked into Agatha's face without replying.

There was a wonderful difference between the two sisters. Frances, with her blue eyes and golden hair, was as unlike Agatha, with her ebon locks and dark eyes, as day is to night.

"No, Agatha, I do not say that," Frances said, slowly.

"I am ill-tempered—perhaps angry, but I will not be unjust. I know, Agatha, that you love Angus. I have seen the truth in your eyes—seen it in a hundred little actions. You look at him as if you wanted to eat him. And now I resign him, freely, to you. I give up all claim."

"Frances, how can you say such a thing?" said Agatha, in sorrowful tones.

"Is it not better to speak the truth than to conceal it?" demanded Frances, pacing restlessly up and down the floor.

"But, are you quite sure that it *is* the truth?" asked Agatha, timidly.

"Yes," and the clear tones of the girl showed no signs of indecision.

"Then it is all over between you and Angus?"

"Yes, and forever!" replied Frances, firmly.

"Why, this is dreadful!" exclaimed Agatha, in blank dismay.

"Dreadful to discover the truth?" asked Frances, in chilly tones.

"But I can not understand it—"

"And I do not choose explain," interrupted Frances, haughtily. "All that I am willing to say in defense of my action is—I am sure I do not love Angus as I ought to love my betrothed husband."

"But, you *did* love him?"

"Yes," and Frances cast down her eyes for a moment as the memory of the past came back to her. She thought of the many, many times that she had told Montgomery that she loved him and him only, and then had given her lips up, willingly to his caresses.

"And *you* have changed?" Agatha asked slowly, and as she spoke she fixed her brilliant black eyes full on the face of her sister.

"Yes, I have changed, even at the risk of being called fickle and heartless, not only by Angus but by every one else who hears of the affair," replied Frances, firmly.

"Are you sure that you know your own mind?" asked Agatha, putting the question directly.

"Yes, for the first time!" answered Frances, quickly. "I have acted like a heartless flirt with a man who loves me better than Angus Montgomery ever dared to. I know this now, and I am sorry for what I have done."

Frances, pacing with quick step up and down the room, did not notice the quiet smile that crept over her sister's face.

"Frances, I think that you are acting very hasty in this matter—"

"Agatha, will you oblige me by attending to your own affairs and letting mine alone?" exclaimed Frances, facing her sister, a scarlet spot burning in her white cheeks.

A ring at the door-bell stopped Agatha's answer.

"Perhaps that is Angus, now," Frances murmured, half to herself and half aloud.

"I'll go, then!" exclaimed Agatha, quickly; "but, Frances, don't be hasty."

Then she hastened from the room.

"I saw this long ago," Agatha murmured, as she ascended the stairs. "She does not know whom she loves; or rather, she doesn't love any one at all. First it was Tulip Roche, then Angus, and now—who? Well, time will tell."

Agatha was right; as yet, Frances Chauncy had never loved.

As Frances had guessed, it was Angus Montgomery. She took the picture and replaced it in the book.

The servant conducted Angus to the parlor.

The twilight of evening had come and the parlor looked sad and gloomy in the misty light as the young man entered it.

Frances rose to receive him—she had buried herself amid the cushions of a large easy-chair at his approach—and extended her hand to him.

Angus felt a chill creep over him as he took the soft, white hand of the fair girl. There was no life in the little hand that lay within his broad palm. No cordial pressure bid him welcome. It was a hand of flesh, yet to Angus it seemed as though it was carved out of stone.

Quietly, Frances sunk back into the embraces of the hug, chair, looking like some sceptered queen giving audience to a rebellious vassal.

Montgomery felt awkward. The greeting—or rather the lack of it—had chilled him.

Mechanically—for Angus hardly knew what he did, so completely had Frances' strange manner confused him—he sat down in a chair that stood by his side, and, leaning his arm on the center-table, looked at the silent beauty as though she was a judge and he a criminal waiting sentence.

For a few moments silence held possession of the room, and the two looked at each other as though they were images in wax rather than living beings.

Montgomery felt decidedly uncomfortable. He experienced a peculiar sensation as though cold water was running down his back. He felt that he must break the awkward silence.

"I saw you at the window to-day as I passed," he said, slowly.

"Yes, and I saw *you*," replied Frances, quickly and there was a touch of bitterness in her tones.

Montgomery felt that he had made an unfortunate beginning.

"I was going to the Park with—"

"You need not trouble yourself to tell *me* where you were going, or who your companions were. I haven't the least bit of curiosity regarding the subject," Frances interrupted, in chilling tones.

Montgomery began to feel annoyed. He had visited Frances with the intention of explaining how it was that he came to drive out with O'Connell and the beautiful French girl. But, this chilling reception utterly confounded him. In his own mind he felt that he had not committed any act that should call down upon his head such a crushing weight of icy coldness.

"Then I suppose that you do not wish me to say anything about the subject?" he said, slowly.

"You are quite right. I do not care to hear any thing about it," Frances replied, in the same chilly tones.

"Well, then, I won't say any thing in regard to it."

Montgomery was annoyed and showed it in his voice.

The cool way in which he spoke angered Frances. She did not intend to let the matter drop *so easily*.

"I think that it is better that you should not speak of it," she said, significantly.

Even in the gloom of the twilight, the girl saw the warm blood leap into Montgomery's face, and detected the angry flash of his eyes.

"Frances, what do you mean by that?" he asked, quickly, and the tones of his voice showed plainly how deeply his pride was hurt by her words.

"If you can not answer the question, I shall not," she said, coldly. She strove to maintain her calmness, yet passion was surging wildly in her veins.

"Your words sound like an accusation, Frances,"—and his tone softened as he pronounced the name—the name of her he loved so well; "have I done any thing to displease you?" And rising, he advanced to the girl, took her hands in his own and looked steadily into her face.

The hands he held were as marble, the face as ice; the blue eyes glittered as coldly as moonbeams shining on polished steel.

"Yes, you have displeased—disgusted me!" Frances said, contemptuously.

Montgomery dropped the little hands as though they had changed into coals of fire. He stared at Frances for a moment like one struck by some sudden shock. The young man had had many bitter things said to him in his life, but none that cut him like the careless words of the girl. In one single instant all the love that had filled his breast—for he had loved Frances Chauncy better than he ever loved any other woman—fled, and in its place came contempt—almost loathing. He now despised the woman that but one little minute ago he had worshiped.

Nothing in this world will kill a man's love so quick as the knowledge that the object of his love is *unworthy* of it. The revulsion then is sudden, complete.

One word had cured Angus Montgomery.

He was not even angry with the woman who had tried to win his love—tried to make him love her, and then wished to humble him to the stature of the slave.

Frances Chauncy had "counted without the host," for she had roused the pride of Montgomery, and that pride was so strong that it even carried love before it. She had wished to dismiss him "humbled," but he was about to retire with the laurels of a victor.

Mentally he congratulated himself on his "escape."

CHAPTER XVII.

MONTGOMERY AND HIS "FRIENDS."

MONTGOMERY looked at Frances with a peculiar expression upon his face.

She did not understand the meaning of the look, and it puzzled her.

"It is all over, then," Montgomery said, slowly.

"Yes," replied Frances.

Someway, it pained her to utter the word.

"Give me back my letters, please; here are yours," and the young man took an envelope from his breast-pocket and gave it to her. In the envelope were six or eight dainty little notes.

Frances Chauncy had little idea how Angus Montgomery had treasured the foolish, loving letters.

The girl was annoyed.

Her action had not taken the young man by surprise, as she had supposed it would. It was very evident to her—from the fact of his having her letters with him—that he had come prepared to end the love-affair existing between them.

"I will bring them in a moment," she said, coldly. Then she rose from her chair and left the room.

"By Jove!" Montgomery muttered to himself, as Frances disappeared, "this is going to be a lucky escape. I came prepared to confess my foolishness in being led into the company of this beautiful French girl, and to ask her for givenness for the seeming fault, and, 'lo and behold!' in a single instant, with one stinging word, she rouses my pride, arms me against the blow which she strikes to crush me. I ought to be very thankful, for the affair might have made me very miserable. As it is, I am glad that it is ended."

Then before the eyes of the young man, as he sat musing in the darkened parlor, rose a beautiful face; eyes of lustrous fire, dark as night's mantle, looked with love upon him;

pouting lips, rosy-red, relieved the whiteness of the alabaster skin; all was perfection. It was the face of Leone that Montgomery saw in his day-dream.

"What a contrast between that glorious creature, so full of life and fire, and this frigid, blue-eyed girl, whose nature is icy-cold and can not warm with passion's flame!" he murmured.

Then, as Montgomery thought on, he suddenly started.

"By Jove!" he cried aloud, as a remembrance flashed across his brain; "the White Witch! Her predictions are coming true. She said that the woman I loved would prove false to me, and she referred to Frances Chauncy. Is it a coincidence, or can it be possible that any one can guess the future? Bah! that is nonsense, and yet it is strange, to say the least. Who could it have been that so aptly played the part of the White Witch? Some one well acquainted both with Frances and myself, that is evident. But how could any one guess that the girl and I would quarrel?"

For a moment or two, Montgomery was silent, plunged in deep thought.

"I have it!" he said, suddenly; "Frances has some confidant—some girl that knows her well, and guessed that she would prove false to me. That girl is the White Witch; I am sure of it! And now I will not rest until I have discovered who she is. It is astonishing that the sudden breaking off of the old love does not give me more pain," he continued, thoughtfully. "Is it because a new one is beginning to take possession of my heart? Or is it that I have never really loved this girl? From the ease with which I am going to give her up, I should think that the latter was the truth. I seem to feel no regret."

The return of Frances put an end to the young man's speculations.

Without a word, she gave the letters into his hand.

Carelessly—not even looking at them—Montgomery tossed them into the open grate where burned a sluggish fire—the autumn air was quite chill.

A few puffs of smoke, a crackling of paper, a light blaze, and the passionate words of love that Angus Montgomery had written to Frances Chauncy vanished into air.

"Now my pictures; yours is in the envelope," Montgomery said.

Frances hesitated for a moment. She had evidently not expected that he would request the return of his pictures. Then, from the album on the center-table, she took them and gave them to him.

Deliberately the young man tore them into pieces and cast them into the fire.

The girl could not understand his meaning. He considered the pictures worthless. Her touch had contaminated them.

Then, without a word, Montgomery left the house. As he turned at the door to close it behind him, he found that Frances had followed him and stood just inside the entryway; her face white as the face of the dead. But Montgomery did not even deign to look at her.

Slowly he descended the steps to the sidewalk, and then walked up the street.

The die was cast.

Angus Montgomery no longer loved Frances Chauncy.

Frances remained for a moment at the open door; then she closed it and re-entered the parlor. She was annoyed—angry. She had expected a stormy interview, and had prepared herself for it. She had looked for bitter reproaches, a torrent of words; but, on the contrary, she had been given up coolly and calmly, as if she had not been worth the winning.

"He never cared any thing for me!" she exclaimed, as she thought over the scene that had just transpired. "If he had cared for me, he would not have given me up so easily." Yet Frances had not loved Angus one-half as much as he had loved her. Her nature was cold—incapable of feeling the ardent passion that turns a desert into a paradise, and makes a heaven of happiness on this dull earth. Such love she could not understand. She had fancied Montgomery—first, because he was possessed of good looks; second, because he was rich. It is very probable that the second reason was stronger far than the first.

We will leave the spoiled child of fortune to her reflections, which were far from being pleasant, and follow Montgomery.

A block or so up the street the young man met Tulip and O'Connell.

"What's the matter?" asked Roche. He noticed the grave look on Montgomery's face.

"Oh, nothing particular," Montgomery replied, striving to appear unconcerned; "only a woman's whim."

It is strange that in all affairs of the heart a man is never happy until he has a confidant.

Tulip and O'Connel guessed the truth at once. They guessed that their plan had succeeded, and that Angus and Frances were as strangers to each other.

"A woman's whim, eh?" Tulip said, with a light laugh.

"I hope that it is nothing concerning Miss Chauncy," O'Connel observed.

"You have hit the truth," Montgomery said; "the engagement between Miss Chauncy and myself no longer exists."

"Is it possible?" exclaimed Tulip, in affected astonishment.

"Yes, it is possible," replied Angus; "we have parted, and forever."

"But, can not the affair be arranged?" suggested O'Connel.

"No."

"But, the reason—pardon the question, perhaps I am trespassing," O'Connel said.

"Not at all. Come and dine with me, and I'll tell you all about it," Montgomery said. "You shall be the judges as to whether I have acted right or wrong."

The two accepted the invitation, and Angus related all the particulars of the misunderstanding between himself and the blonde beauty.

Of course, Tulip and O'Connel declared that he could not have acted otherwise, and that he was perfectly justified in doing what he had done.

Dinner over, the three adjourned to Angus' snuggerly to enjoy their cigars.

"By the way," said Tulip, suddenly, "you spoke about having a safe to keep your valuables in, Angus?"

"Yes, I have one," replied Montgomery; "it's much safer than to trust them to the mercy of some banker who may astonish me some fine morning by decamping without notice, like the fleet-footed Catlin."

"But, then, there's the chance of being robbed?" suggested O'Connel.

"Very little danger of that," Montgomery replied. "I keep the safe in my bed-chamber, and, as I'm a light sleeper, I think that it would be a difficult job for any one to get at it without waking me up."

"Do you know, Angus, I'd like to see it?" Tulip said. "I think that it is a capital idea, and I have half-a-mind to buy one myself."

"Certainly, it's only in the next room," Angus said.

Then the three young men entered the bed-chamber.

The safe stood in one corner of the room.

Montgomery knelt and opened it.

"You see, it can not be opened without knowing the combination," Montgomery said.

"Yes, I see," O'Connel replied, and he knelt by Montgomery's side and examined the lock of the little safe with great attention.

"It is clearly impossible for any one to pick such a lock as that, I should say," Tulip remarked, bending over the other two.

"Oh, clearly impossible!" O'Connel exclaimed.

Then Tulip sauntered over to the other side of the room and took up a double-barreled shot-gun that stood in a corner.

"What did this gun cost, Angus?" he asked.

"I don't exactly remember; somewhere about a hundred and fifty, I think," Angus replied.

"It's a breech-loader; isn't it? Come and show me how it works," Tulip said, examining the gun with great attention.

Angus rose to his feet, crossed the room, and commenced to explain the peculiarities of the gun to Tulip. His back was turned to the safe, where O'Connel was still on his knees before it.

Hardly had Angus left his side, when O'Connel deftly drew the key from the lock of the safe, and, with a small piece of wax, which he drew from his vest-pocket—apparently provided for just such a chance as this—he took an impression of the key. Then he put the wax away, returned the key to its place, and closing the safe-door, locked it.

"Have you changed the 'combination?'" Angus asked.

"No," O'Connel replied, rising and handing him the key.

"You see how it works?" Montgomery said to Tulip, referring to the gun.

"Oh, yes, perfectly," Tulip replied.

"By the way, Tulip, are you going anywhere this evening?" asked Montgomery, suddenly, putting down the gun.

"Yes, O'Connel and I were going to call upon the countess," Tulip said.

"Come with us," O'Connel added.

"No, no, don't ask him!" Tulip cried, in mock despair; "what chance will we have to make an impression if he goes?"

"Oh, I'm not a dangerous rival!" Montgomery exclaimed laughing.

"I submit under protest," Tulip rejoined.

"We will have time for a stroll down Broadway first," O'Connel said.

Then the three left the house.

As they passed into the street, Tulip contrived to exchange a word with O'Connel, unnoticed by Montgomery.

"Did you succeed?" Tulip asked.

"Yes," O'Connel replied.

"You had time enough?"

"Plenty."

"When will you make the attempt?"

"As soon as possible."

Then Montgomery joined them, and the three proceeded toward Broadway.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE DOG MAN CALLS UPON THE COUNTESS.

LEONE, now known to the world as Leone Eperlay, the daughter of a French count, but whom the reader knows better as Leone Basque, the music-teacher, sat in her luxuriantly furnished parlor and looked out on busy Broadway.

Idly she watched the ever-moving throng. Her thoughts were elsewhere.

"It is a terrible game that Lionel is playing," she murmured, thoughtfully. "What can be his motive—money? yes; but something more than money. What can it be? Oh, I am tired of being his slave!" A wail of pain, heart-felt, was in her voice as she spoke. "When will the time come that brings me release from my bondage? Not, I fear, until I am in grave-clothes. Oh! what a fate is mine. What am I? A lure to entice to ruin the man that I love with all my heart and soul. The beauty that nature has given me is now a curse. Why did not this man hate me? Yet, I can not find it in my heart to try and make him do so. No, in his presence, I am happy, I exert all my womanly gifts to make him like me. I play well the part that Lionel has forced me to act. I am ashamed of myself when I think of it." And, sorrowfully, Leone buried her face in her hands.

A low knock upon the door aroused her from her reverie. Leone, with a sigh, raised her head.

"Come in!" she said, thinking that it was one of the servants of the hotel.

In obedience to the order, the door opened and a stranger entered.

He was a man a little below the medium size, dressed plainly, but not poorly. His face was a peculiar one, thin and with an impression of shrewdness visibly stamped upon it.

"I begs your pardon, ma'am," he said, with a low bow, removing his hat; "I 'opes I ain't intruding, but would you like to buy a dorg?"

Then the man—who was Chris Pipgan in person—drew from a pocket of his coat one of the prettiest little dogs that Leone had ever seen. It was hardly bigger than a rat, a terrier of the kind called black and tan.

Leone was passionately fond of all living things, and, as the little puppy danced, brisk as a bee, about the room, she could not help admiring it.

"I am afraid that it would be too much trouble to keep him here in the hotel," she said.

"Not a bit of trouble, ma'am, and he's the best tempered little animal that ever was." And as Pipgan spoke he was watching Leone, narrowly, with a covert glance.

"No, I fear I could not take care of him," Leone said.

"Why, he'll take care of himself, ma'am."

"What's his name?"

"Mally, ma'am."

"Mally? Why, what a strange name?" Leone said, wondering.

"Yes, it is odd, isn't it, ma'am?" said the dog-fancier, thoughtfully, as if the oddness of the dog's name had just occurred to him. "You see, ma'am, Mally is short for Malper— Oh, Christmas! I've done it now!" he cried, in excitement, for, at the mention of the name, Leone, with a low moan, had fainted.

"What a cursed fool I was to blurt it out!" he cried, in despair, as he bent over the senseless girl. "I might have known that she ain't made of iron, but just the most delicate piece of handywork that old Mother Nature ever turned out; and now I've killed her. You fool you!" and Pipgan began to tear his hair in despair, while the puppy, astonished at the noise, sat on its haunches and surveyed the scene with wonder.

A low sigh came from the girl.

A glass of water was standing on the table. Pipgan ran to it, and then returning to Leone's side, sprinkled the water over her forehead.

Slowly, Leone's senses came back to her.

She opened her eyes, wearily. As her look fell upon the face of the dog-fancier, she shuddered.

"I'm verri sorry you're sick, ma'am?" he said, humbly.

"I—I suppose that it was the heat of the room," Leone said, in confusion; her eyes searching the face of the stranger as though she expected to read something written therein. But she saw nothing in his features to excite her fears.

"You're better now, ma'am?" he said.

"Yes, much better," she replied.

"I'm very glad," and Pipgan showed it in his face. "Do you think that you'd like the little dorg, ma'am?"

"I do not think that I could take care of him." Then Leone looked wistfully into his face as if she wanted to say something more. But the dog-fancier pretended not to notice the look.

"It is a very pretty little dog," Leone said, absently.

"Yes, ma'am," replied Pipgan.

"What—what did you say the dog's name was?" Leone asked, her voice trembling, in spite of her efforts to appear calm and unconcerned.

"His name, ma'am?" Strange to say, the dog-man seemed to hesitate about answering the question.

"Yes, his name," repeated Leone.

"Mally, short for Malper, ma'am," said the man, slowly, and raising his eyes to the face of the girl.

Again Leone tried to read the face of the dog-man, but again the attempt was useless.

"It is a very odd name," Leone said, slowly.

"Yes, ma'am. I don't know who gave the puppy the name. The man that I bought him from yesterday said that was his name, and that was how I knew it," the dog-man explained.

"It is a very strange name," the girl said, absently.

To the keen eyes of Pipgan it was plain that the young girl's thoughts were neither of the dog nor of his name, but far away.

"Then, you think that you don't want to buy a dorg?" Pipgan said, taking up the puppy and putting it away, snugly, in one of his large pockets.

"No, thank you," replied Leone.

"I axes your pardon, Miss, for disturbing you," said Pipgan, awkwardly backing out.

Then the door closed behind him.

Once secure from observation, Pipgan's manner changed entirely.

Thoughtfully he stood, biting his fingers.

"Shall I?" he muttered. "Why not? That's the question; why not? Anybody else would, why not I? Some chaps would coin many a bank-note out of this gold mine. How the name fetched her! Blessed if I didn't feel sorry for her, poor, young kitten! I wasn't sure about it; but, now, I'd take my 'davy' afore any 'beak' in 'Lunnun' town. What's to be done? that's the question. It will cost me a matter of fifty pounds to use the cable and telegraph, maybe; and fifty pounds in gold is a good many dollars in greenbacks. But, as I said afore, why shouldn't I? I'll think over it."

Then Mr. Chris Pipgan took his way quietly out of the hotel.

After the departure of the dog-fancier Leone remained motionless, like one in a maze.

For full ten minutes she sat, fixed as a statue; then she suddenly rose and began, restlessly to pace up and down the room.

"What can this mean?" she exclaimed. "Is this only a

strange coincidence, or is it a warning of danger? Shall I tell Lionel? Hal! He will only laugh at me. Oh, what a foolish child I am to fear! I see a specter in every shadow, like a school-girl in the dark. I should have stronger nerves, for I will need them. I have a difficult scheme to carry out, and yet the thought of failure has never entered my mind."

Then Leone seated herself again at the window.

With the evening came the three young men, Angus Montgomery, Tulip Roche and Lionel O'Connell.

As Montgomery clasped the taper fingers extended to give him welcome, felt the soft pressure of the slender white hand, and saw the eyes of the young girl beam with delight, he felt a subtle influence stealing over him. It was like the poison of the flowers, it lulled every sense of sweet forgetfulness, and yet to forget—to sleep—was to die.

But, Angus Montgomery did not resist the sweet, magnetic influence.

In the glad smile of Leone he forgot Frances Chauncy and her heart of ice.

The evening passed rapidly away.

At ten the three took their departure.

"What do you think of her?" asked O'Connell, carelessly, as they proceeded through Twenty-ninth street.

"The most beautiful woman that I ever laid eyes on!" exclaimed Montgomery, in rapture.

"What, Angus, as bad as that?" asked O'Connell, laughing.

"Oh, a clear case of love at first sight!" cried Tulip, joining in the laugh.

"You may laugh as much as you please, gentlemen, but it is the truth," Montgomery replied.

"What, that you are over head and ears in love with this divine creature?" exclaimed O'Connell.

"Pshaw! you know I didn't mean that!" replied Montgomery; "but, laugh as much as you please, I freely confess that if the heart of Miss Leone is still her own, I intend to try and win it."

"Pistols and coffee!" cried O'Connell, theatrically.

"We'll have to resign all claim!" exclaimed Tulip, in a tone of extreme sadness, and with a comic look of mortification.

"Do, and both of you shall assist at the wedding!" cried Montgomery, gayly.

A peculiar expression flitted across the faces of his companions as Montgomery spoke, but in the darkness Angus did not notice it.

"Come, gentlemen, join me in a glass of champagne before you go home; drink to the success of my wooing!" exclaimed Angus.

"With all my heart!" Tulip cried.

"I second the motion," O'Connell added.

Then the three proceeded to Montgomery's house. With the foaming champagne in their glasses, the perfumed incense filling the air, they pledged the health of Leone, Countess of Epernay, and Angus Montgomery.

A second bottle followed the first, and then the little party broke up.

Angus accompanied his friends to the door, bade them "good-night," and then retired to his chamber.

Bright were the thoughts of the young man, and high were his hopes.

The future looked clear and joyous. All the love that was in his heart for the blonde beauty, Frances Chauncy, had faded out, and in its place sprung up the fiery passion that the passionate dark eyes of the beautiful Leone had inspired.

Angus sat down by the window for a few minutes, looked out upon the darkness of the night, and vaguely speculated upon the future!

Then he proceeded to prepare for rest.

Angus turned the gas down low, and then went to bed.

It was some time before sleep came to him.

The face of the beautiful girl, Leone, danced before his closed eyes. Thoughts of her were in his mind and kept sleep from him.

But at last tired nature exerted its power, and Montgomery slept.

How long the young man had slept he knew not, when a sudden stealthy noise aroused him.

He opened his eyes, and beheld two dark forms, their faces concealed by black masks, standing by his bedside.

The gas, burning dimly, shed a weird light over the chamber.

Montgomery would have cried aloud, but a gleaming dagger at his throat checked his utterance.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE DETECTIVE'S OPINION.

MONTGOMERY comprehended the situation at a glance. He saw, though, that resistance was almost useless.

Then, before he had time to think what he should do, the masked figure, standing by his side, pressed a damp sponge upon his nostrils.

A peculiar incense filled the air.

Montgomery's senses reeled and wandered.

He realized that he was being put under the influence of some powerful drug.

He attempted to struggle against it, but the effort was useless. He could not move.

Slowly, little by little, he sunk into forgetfulness.

Then all was a blank.

How long he remained in a state of stupor he could not tell, but when, with a start and shiver, he opened his eyes, the bright sunlight was streaming into his room.

Montgomery rose to a sitting posture and looked around him.

The events of the night seemed like a disordered dream, yet, when his glance fell upon the papers scattered carelessly about the floor and the opened safe, he comprehended that his dream was reality.

Montgomery hastily dressed himself, then proceeded to examine the room.

His own bunch of keys in the safe-door showed him how the midnight plunderers had obtained access to his valuables. They had taken the keys from his pocket while he slept under the influence of the potent drug.

Montgomery examined the safe, amazed, and well he might be, for he had been robbed of thirty thousand dollars in Government bonds.

For a moment after making the discovery Montgomery was stupefied. He could hardly realize the extent of the loss.

Then the warning of the mysterious woman, who had called herself the White Witch, flashed across his mind.

Her words were coming true.

The woman he loved had proved false to him; half his fortune was gone, and all within a month.

"There is more than chance in this!" he muttered. "So far she has predicted truly; is the rest of her speech as true? Am I fated to lose the other half of my fortune? Will my friends prove false to me? Forewarned they say is forearmed; but the warning has been of little service to me. I must send for a detective at once and try to capture these midnight visitors before they can dispose of their plunder."

Then the eyes of the young man were attracted by an open paper upon the floor. He picked it up and examined it. It was his insurance policy of his house. Carelessly, he noticed the date.

"It expires on the tenth of October. I must see that it is renewed in season," he said. "If I have three enemies, as the White Witch says, they might take a fancy to set fire to my house some dark night, and I can't afford to lose ten thousand more. Fifty thousand dollars in two weeks is no joke even to a man worth a hundred thousand. If this goes on, another month may see me a beggar."

A cloud darkened Montgomery's brow. Despite his effort not to think of it, the mysterious warning of the White Witch was ever in his mind.

"Now for the detective," he said, as he sat down to his desk and penned a hasty note.

Then he proceeded down-stairs, gave the note to one of the servants with an order to deliver it instantly.

That done, he sat down to breakfast. He had locked his room-door after him so that no one could disturb any thing until the arrival of the officer.

During breakfast, Angus put a few careless questions to the old servant who attended to his wants and who had supreme charge of the household.

He soon discovered that no one in the house, except himself, had any knowledge of the midnight visitors.

Soon after Angus had finished his meal the detective arrived.

The officer was a tall, portly man, with a full beard and a clear, blue eye.

Angus conducted him to his sleeping chamber and then, briefly, explained why he had sent for him.

"Robbed, eh?" said the detective.

"Yes."

"Twenty thousand dollars?"

"No, thirty thousand."

"Any thing else gone?"

"No, not that I can discover."

"Two men?"

"Yes."

"How were they dressed?"

"Well, I can hardly say; the gas was burning very dimly and about all I could see was the outlines of their forms."

"Dark clothes?"

"Yes."

"Were they large or small?"

"The man who stood by my bed and who applied the sponge was, I should judge, something about my own size."

"And the other?"

"I did not notice him enough to see."

"What did they have on their heads?"

"Felt hats, I think."

The officer was noting Montgomery's answers down in his note-book.

"Not sure?"

"No."

"The man by the bed held a knife to your throat?"

"Yes."

"Did you notice his hand?"

"Yes."

"Ah," and the detective listened with increased attention. "Was it large or small? looked like the hand of a workman or the hand of a gentleman not soiled by labor?"

"I can't tell you; the hand was covered by a heavy, dark glove."

The officer stroked his beard, reflectively.

"Gloved, eh? Well, that's something new."

"So, of course, it is impossible for me to say whether the hand was large or small, coarse or delicate?"

"Yes." The officer was perplexed. Again he stroked his beard. "Have you any idea how they got into the house?"

"No."

"The front door all right this morning? locked and bolted as usual?"

"Yes; there is no bolt, by the way, only a lock."

"Well, I must say, Mr. Montgomery, that this is about as neat an affair as I have ever heard of," the officer said, thoughtfully. "A very neat job. Have you numbers of the bonds?"

"Yes, here in the safe."

Then Angus opened the little tin box in which he had kept the record, together with some other papers, but, to his astonishment, the list was gone.

"Perhaps it's among some of these papers on the floor," suggested the officer.

Vain was the search, however; the paper was not to be found.

"Perhaps your broker has a list of the numbers," said the officer.

Angus shook his head.

"No hope there," he replied. "The bonds I got from Catlin, who absconded a short time ago, if you remember—the Wall street broker."

The officer nodded his head. He remembered the circumstance.

"The rogues must have found the list and carried it off with the bonds."

"Well, it looks like it, sir," said the detective, slowly.

"It is a bad business."

"Very bad."

"I don't perceive how I could identify my property, even if I caught the rascals with it."

"No, it would be difficult," replied the officer.

"Can you advise me how to proceed in this matter?" asked Angus.

"Well, Mr. Montgomery, to tell the honest truth, I can't. This little affair just beats me," replied the detective, candidly. "I have heard of, and come across, some neat job in my time, but this jest takes the rag off of all of 'em. Your servants are all square, eh?"

"I think so. I have only four, and they have been with me for years," Montgomery replied.

"Well, whoever did this little stroke of business was evil."

dently well acquainted with your house, because strangers to the premises wouldn't have risked such a bold game. In the first place, they knew that you had the bonds in the safe; second, they knew about the time you went to bed, and that you carried the key of the safe on your key-ring. It would be pretty hard for them to learn all this without a good deal of spying, and perhaps with the assistance of some one in the house."

"I think that all my servants are trustworthy," said Montgomery, with a clouded brow. The words of the officer were raising strange suspicions in his mind. Suspicions that but an hour before he would have laughed at.

"You can't always tell who to suspect and who not," replied the detective, sagely. "Why, you've no idea, Mr. Montgomery, how many robberies are committed with the aid of the servants. Take a good-looking servant-girl for instance. She meets a dashy young feller with plenty of jewelry, somewhere. He makes all sorts of love to her, and through the girl finds out all about the habits of the family; if they keep their silver lying round loose, etc. The girl never dreams why her nice young man is so inquisitive; and so some dark night the house is robbed, and nary a clue left for us officers to work on. The girl loses her gallant young man, and wonders why."

"I don't think that there is any thing of that sort going on in my household, because both my female servants are married," said Montgomery.

"Perhaps the male servants have some intimate friends," suggested the officer.

"I will endeavor to discover the truth about that," replied Angus. "Any thing else you can suggest? Of course I will gladly pay a large reward for the capture of the robbers or the return of the bonds."

"You will be more likely to get the bonds than the thieves," said the detective, significantly. "The only thing I can think of now is to put an advertisement in the papers and offer to negotiate for the return of the bonds."

"That will be 'compounding a felony,' eh?"

"Oh, bless you! that's common enough!" exclaimed the officer; "but I'm afraid that there isn't much hope. I'll keep my eyes on two or three of the gentlemen who operate in the bond-robbery line, and if I find one of them uncommon flush, I'll jest drop on him. Perhaps I may light on the right man by accident."

Then the detective took his departure.

Montgomery paced up and down the room for a few minutes in silence.

"Can it be possible that the wild story of the League of Three has a tangible foundation—that three men are striking these terrible blows against me? It seems impossible, and yet—I am puzzled!"

Again Montgomery paced up and down the room. His brow was clouded; his lips firmly compressed.

"Would to heaven that I could see this strange woman again!" he exclaimed, suddenly. "Perhaps I am a fool to allow this matter to occupy my mind to such an extent, and yet her words seem ever ringing in my ears. She said, too, that a woman who loved me better than she did her own life, was fated to bring me to ruin. Can she mean this beautiful French girl, Leone? And at that time, too, I had never met her. This looks like reading the future. Pshaw! it must be chance. I am as great an idiot to think of this stupid masquerading frolic as any old woman predicting fortune and misfortune from the dregs of a tea-cup."

Montgomery reasoned well, and yet he did not convince himself.

The predictions of the mysterious woman had come true so far, but the worst yet remained unfulfilled.

CHAPTER XX.

THE "COUNTESS" AND THE ADVENTURER.

A WEEK went by, and Montgomery's search for the masked men who had so mysteriously robbed him had been a fruitless one.

In the week he had called twice upon the beautiful girl who had so strangely bewitched him.

At each interview the charm grew stronger and stronger.

Montgomery fancied, too, that Leone looked with eyes of favor upon him.

It was on a pleasant Saturday afternoon that O'Connell and Leone sat together in the apartment of the latter.

O'Connell had just entered the room. His face was flushed with triumph, and he flung himself carelessly into a chair.

"Well, Leone, our bark sails smoothly on the tide; we have done well, girl, and now we must hasten and complete our work."

"What do you mean?" asked Leone, slowly, a peculiar light shining in her dark eyes.

"Why, that the net is closing around the prey."

"You mean Angus Montgomery?"

"Yes; he loves you, Leone."

"I know it," said the girl, sadly.

"Ah! you do? Has he, then, declared his passion?"

"With his eyes, yes—"

"And his lips, no; eh?"

"Very true."

"And you are as deeply in love with him as he is with you?"

"Yes," slowly and sadly came the confession from the red lips of the girl.

"Leone, I've half a mind to let you have this man."

"You have?" and the girl looked at him with eager eyes.

"Yes, after I have done with him. See how generous I am!" and O'Connell laughed as he spoke.

"When you have done with him?"

"Yes; don't imagine that I'm going to strike at his life; oh, no! Two more blows I aim at him and then he's all your own."

"He would despise me if he knew the cowardly part that I am playing," Leone murmured, bitterly.

"He will never know it unless you choose to tell him yourself," O'Connell replied. "These two blows will crush him to the earth, a ruined man; then he must leave New York—it is necessary for my plans. His presence here will defeat my aims. Let him fly to the Great West, where a future awaits the strong-armed man who is willing to wrest it from the bosom of the prairie. You can go with him. I will permit it, give you back the pledge that binds you to me. Nay more, I'll give you money to start you in your new life. Come, Leone, is not my offer a fair one?"

"Yes, for you." There was a little bit of sarcasm in the tones of the girl that stung the keen-witted adventurer.

"For me, eh?" and O'Connell's lip curled as he spoke.

"Yes; I will say frankly what is in my mind," replied Leone; "I never yet saw you show one little bit of mercy to any one that was in your power, and I did not believe that it was in your nature."

"But do you not believe it now?" he asked.

"If you are not deceiving me—"

"Why should I deceive you?" he cried, hastily. "Don't be childish, Leone. Whatever my faults may be, deception is not one of them, unless, indeed, I have an object to gain. Now then, what can I gain by pretending to give you up to this man?"

"I can not tell," replied Leone. "You attain the end you aim at by devious and secret paths. I can not follow you."

"And yet you have known me many years, Leone."

"Yes, and yet I do not think that I know you. You are changing, Lionel. You have always pursued your foes with a bitter and an undying hatred, and now—"

"I am willing to let one of my foes escape me," he said, finishing the sentence. "Even more than that; I am willing to give him the woman who has been my companion through many long years, clouded by suffering. Who has been like a guardian angel to me. The girl who toiled all day long as a menial for the scanty pittance that I might throw away in the evening, in one little hour, at the gaming table. See how noble I am! Why, I give him a treasure! You would work your fingers to the bone to keep him from want, and why? because you love him! What mystic charm is there in that passion? I have never felt it. I never saw the woman yet that I would make myself a slave for; nor the woman, excepting you, who would toil for me. Why is it that you have done so? Have you loved me as you now love him?"

Leone shook her head in reply.

"I thought not," he said with a cynical laugh. "Why then have you clung to me in all my desperate fortunes with fidelity?"

"Have you so soon forgotten the bond that binds me to you? You reminded me of it when you forced me to act the

part of a siren and lure Angus Montgomery to his ruin," she said with bitter accents.

"Oh, that is it, eh?"

"Yes."

"Because you pledged your word?"

"Yes."

"And you believe in keeping your word?"

"Yes; do you not?"

"When it suits my purpose to do so," he replied with a careless laugh; "otherwise no. Then you will hold to your word?"

"Until you release me from it, yes," answered Leone, firmly.

"Leone, listen to me," said O'Connel, after remaining silent for a moment, apparently in deep thought. "I will give you back your word on the one condition, that you will play your part in this little comedy of my contriving to the end. Then, my designs accomplished, in reward for your services, I will release you from your pledge. You shall be free to go where you please and with whom you please; with Angus Montgomery, if you like."

Leone's countenance was flushed with joy at the words.

"You are not deceiving me?" she exclaimed.

"No, I'll keep my promise," he replied. Then he looked at her for a moment, an odd smile upon his face. "Why, Leone, you seem to be overjoyed at the prospect of leaving me."

"I will not deceive you; I am," replied the girl, honestly.

"All the old love gone?"

"Yes."

"And you love me no longer?"

Again Leone shook her head.

"No, eh?"

"Yes."

O'Connel made a wry face.

Leone was candid but not complimentary.

"Perhaps it is better so," he said, quietly. "And now that we have settled this little matter we will proceed to arrange the programme for the future."

"What is to be done?" Leone asked.

"You know that I have told you to try and make this young man love you and yet not give him a chance to declare his affection?"

"Yes, I have performed the task. He does love me and yet he has not declared his passion," Leone said.

"Now then, you must change your tactics. He must declare his love, and you—well, you can speak the truth; I know that it will be agreeable to you," said O'Connel, with a covert sneer.

Leone blushed crimson and cast down her eyes.

"You are shortly to have a great change in your fortunes," continued O'Connel.

Leone looked up in astonishment.

"You are the daughter of a French count, you know. Your venerable papa was killed at Saarbruck at the head of his regiment. Your property in the north of France has been managed by your father's steward and the income from it sent to you."

"Why do you repeat this tissue of lies?" asked the girl, her lip curling in scorn.

"I thought, perhaps, that you had forgotten your history," replied O'Connel, with his usual baffling smile.

"I have not."

"Ah, well; Leone, Countess of Epernay—or to speak more correctly, Viscountess of Epernay, for you are the daughter of a count and not his wife—we are still keeping up the fable, you know. A great misfortune has befallen you."

"Indeed?" Leone saw that the cunning wit of the adventurer had in reserve some clever device.

"Yes, a terrible misfortune," said O'Connel; "those horrible Prussians have eaten up all your property."

Leone looked at O'Connel in astonishment.

"I do not understand—"

"Of course not; wait and you shall. When I say that they have eaten up your property, I mean that they have destroyed it. The French troops retreating before the German army occupied your chateau and endeavored to make a stand there. Their action brought on a battle—a terrible fight, and the result was that your beautiful chateau was burnt to the ground, your domain devastated and destroyed, and you are now a beggar; a stranger, too, in a strange land." Then O'Connel paused, looked at Leone's bewildered face and laughed.

"And am I to tell this story?"

"Yes, of course."

"But the object?"

"Only a whim of mine," said O'Connel, carelessly.

"But I do not understand!" exclaimed Leone, in wonder.

"I will explain. This story is not to be told at present; it is for the future. First, you lead Montgomery to tell you that he loves you—declare the passion that is raging in his breast. Then you will tell him that you return his love—the truth, by the way, Leone."

Again the girl cast down her eyes before his sneering gaze, and the warm blood flushed her white cheek.

"And after enjoying the happiness, that these mutual vows will give, for a few days, then you will receive a letter from France which will relate all the melancholy particulars of the destruction of your ancestral home," continued O'Connel. "You will be deeply affected at the news; of course, you will tell your affianced husband, for Montgomery will occupy that position by that time—all the terrible news; that you are penniless, far from home and friends."

"Yes?" Leone's brow contracted; she began to see the drift of the scheme.

"Of course there is but one way open to him—"

"You mean that I am to rob him of his money and give it to you?" cried Leone, indignantly.

"That's an ugly word that you are using," replied O'Connel, coolly. "Besides, you could hardly take from him more than a couple of hundred dollars without appearing to trespass upon his generosity, and what do I care for a paltry sum like that?"

"What then is the scheme?"

"He will press money upon you; you will refuse—at first; then—afterward—after repeated urging, you will consent to receive some slight assistance from him. But, to receive vulgar money, oh, no! But if he will sign a blank check and leave it with you, you will fill it out with the sum that you think will suffice for your wants."

"But still I do not understand," said Leone, in a maze.

"Then you will give the check to me."

"What will you do with it?"

"Oh, keep it to look at," replied O'Connel, carelessly.

"Is this not a trick—a trap?" she questioned.

"Oh, what a thing suspicion is!" O'Connel exclaimed; "what use can I put the check to? When he signs that check he will be a ruined man. What further damage can I do him when my aim is to spare his life and strike only at his fortune?"

"Well, as you please; you are my master," said Leone, slowly and sadly.

"Until I resign you to the arms of Angus Montgomery."

CHAPTER XXI.

ANOTHER BLOW.

LEONE did not reply.

O'Connel watched her for a few moments in silence.

"Leone," he said, suddenly, "do you expect any visitors before evening?"

"No," she replied.

"And this evening?"

"Yes."

"Montgomery?"

"Yes," and again the rich color deepened in the cheeks of the girl.

"Leone, I'm utterly worn out. May I rest on your sofa for an hour or so? I was up all last night."

"Throwing your money away at the gaming-table again," said the girl, disdainfully.

"Yes and no, both in a breath!" replied O'Connel, in his careless way. "I was a devotee at the shrine of la belle goddess, Fortune, but I didn't throw my money away. On the contrary, the fickle jade smiled on me and I won largely. Fortune is rightly represented by a woman, for she smiles on the man in the sunshine and turns her back in cold disdain upon the poor wretch in the shadow," and with this not very complimentary speech—as far as the female sex are concerned—O'Connel stretched himself out upon the sofa.

Leone left the window, and drawing a rocking-chair to the head of the sofa sat down on it.

With her little hand she smoothed back the crispy, silken curls that clustered on the broad, pale forehead of O'Connel.

As the young man lay, extended at full length upon the sofa, he seemed a perfect representative of glorious manhood.

The quick, expressive muscles of the face were now in repose. There was a mental beauty in the features that one would never have dreamed of when the eyes were open and the lips moving.

"Do you think your words apply to me, Lionel?" asked the girl, softly bending over him, her hand tangled in the crispy, silken locks.

O'Connel opened his eyes and looked up into the beautiful face, bent down so near his own.

"Leone," he said, after a moment's pause, "there are exceptions to every rule. You are an angel, if ever there was one on this earth. I am not worthy to be by your side, yet I have forced you to do my will, to aid me in my desperate schemes. I am sorry that I am obliged to do so, but I can not help it. Fate has placed you in my power; you *must* serve me. The day, though, is not far distant when you will be the happy wife of the man that you love so well. No more perilous schemes then, no more the 'sea-sick bark' will 'dash on the breaking rocks'; all will be peace, rest and love. Is not the future bright, Leone, after all the danger and darkness of the past?"

"Yes," murmured the girl, slowly.

"Keep up your heart then; bear with my unyielding temper but a few weeks more—perhaps only a few days—and then you shall enjoy the blessings of a pure and holy love. I know that such a love does exist, and transforms earth into heaven, although I have never felt it."

"And perhaps I never shall," said Leone.

"Why, what can prevent it? I know that the man to whom you have given your heart loves you in return. Know that he will gladly marry you."

"Will he if he knows the past?" whispered Leone, bending her head until her dark locks mingled with the golden curls of O'Connel.

"That is a difficult question to answer," said O'Connel, thoughtfully. "If he loves you as well as I think he does, he will. He will forgive all, take you to his heart and cherish you as you deserve to be cherished."

"Oh, if I could only think so!" murmured the girl, sadly.

"But, how can he ever know the past? It is buried in our breasts. No power can dig it up. I shall hold my tongue, and of course you will yours," O'Connel said, quickly.

"Marry him without his knowing of the past?" asked the girl, a shudder shaking her slight form.

"Certainly," replied O'Connel, quickly. "What has he to do with your past life? Nothing! Make him so happy in the future that he will never dream of asking in regard to the past."

"But would it not be cruel to deceive him?" Leone asked.

"All women deceive men in something."

"I can never deceive him," said Leone, firmly.

"No?" said O'Connel, in astonishment.

"Do you think that I could be happy with him with this terrible secret tearing at my heart?" she asked, her face plainly showing how deeply she was affected. "It would turn to torture all the bliss that his love could give me."

"Why, you foolish girl, would you tell him every thing?" said O'Connel, in wonder.

"Yes; before he marries me he shall know all my past life. If he chooses to forget and forgive, then his love will make me happy," replied Leone.

"Well, it wouldn't make any difference to me," said O'Connel, thoughtfully. "It is not your fault but mine. By the way, Leone, now that I think of it, just you keep this matter quiet until you are away from New York. Montgomery, even if he chooses to overlook it, may have some insane idea of calling me to an account for my share in it."

"I promise," replied Leone.

"Do you know, Leone," said O'Connel, suddenly, and looking up in the girl's face, "there was a time when I thought that you would never love any one in the world but me? You have changed."

"Yes," and Leone pushed back the yellow curls and imprinted a soft kiss upon the massive, white forehead.

"You no longer love me?"

"No."

"What has changed you?"

"Oh, Lionel! can you not guess?" said the girl sorrowfully.

A peculiar expression shot across O'Connel's face, then he closed his eyes.

"Let me sleep, Leone, that's a good girl," he said.

Silence held possession of the room.

In five minutes, Lionel O'Connel was fast asleep.

Leone watched him with an anxious look, resting her arm upon the head of the sofa and her head upon her hand.

For fully a quarter of an hour Leone remained motionless, watching the sleeper.

Then O'Connel turned restlessly on his side, his lips opened; he muttered a name. Leone bent her head to listen.

O'Connel was talking in his sleep.

At five o'clock O'Connel awoke, and then took his departure.

Coming out of the hotel, he met Tulip and Stoll.

He joined them and all three went down the street together.

"Every thing going all right?" asked Stoll, cautiously.

"Yes," replied O'Connel. "Why, man, the game was in our hands from the first."

"One thing astonishes me," said Tulip.

"And what is that?" asked O'Connel.

"About those bonds. I felt sure that Montgomery had at least thirty thousand dollars' worth."

"And yet there was but twenty in the safe," said O'Connel.

"Are you sure that you secured all?" asked Stoll.

"Yes, I think so; but still, there might have been some secreted in the safe that I overlooked in the hurry of the search," replied O'Connel, thoughtfully. "But, Stoll," he continued, "did you succeed in disposing of all of them?"

"Yes, I've got the money in my pocket," replied the broker. "We'll go in somewhere, get a private room, and then we can settle up the transaction."

"Montgomery hasn't made much noise about his loss," O'Connel said.

"He hasn't made any at all," observed Tulip. "Probably, though, he has the detectives on the watch."

"And much good it will do him," said Stoll, with a coarse chuckle.

"It was a lucky thought of yours, O'Connel, to steal the list, containing the number of the bonds," Tulip remarked.

"Yes; if Montgomery had had the list, and had made it public, we couldn't have put a single bond on the market," said the broker.

"We have played a bold game, and so far, we have been very successful," O'Connel said, thoughtfully.

"Satan himself seems to aid us," observed Tulip; "why, Stoll, Montgomery laid his bunch of keys down carelessly, upon the table, and O'Connel picked them up without being seen. So you see we secured entrance both to the house and safe without trouble."

"Yes; but, gentlemen, have you ever considered that we are rendering ourselves liable to go to the State prison at Sing Sing?" said Stoll, with a shiver.

"Not if we are true to each other," replied O'Connel, coldly. "The one who betrays the league knows his fate. Besides, nearly all the personal risk is over; one more blow and then we do our work by deputy."

"When do we strike the next blow?" Tulip asked.

"To-night."

"So soon?"

"Yes, I am eager to finish the matter. It will not take long now," O'Connel replied.

"The sooner it is finished the better!" Stoll exclaimed.

"You are resolved, gentlemen, to abide by our compact and push the matter to the bitter end?" O'Connel said.

"Yes," Tulip replied, firmly.

"Certainly," added Stoll.

"Nothing but the complete ruin of this man can satisfy our vengeance?"

"Nothing else!" said Tulip, in a quiet way, but in a voice full of determination.

"My idea exactly," said Stoll.

Few, to look at the three men, strolling so carelessly down Broadway, would have guessed that they were plotting the ruin of a man, who believed two of them at least to be his friends.

Life is sometimes a huge masquerade.

Angus Montgomery, after spending a delightful evening with Leone, the fair enchantress, whose beauty had cast such a spell over his heart, retired to rest early.

Busy thoughts were in his mind, and he lay awake until the clock struck twelve; then, slumber closed his eyes.

He had not slept an hour when he was suddenly aroused from his slumbers by the startling cry of "Fire!" coming from the street below.

Montgomery leaped from the bed and hurriedly dressed himself, as he felt sure, from the noise, that the fire was near.

He was about half dressed, when the old servant, who had charge of the household, rushed into the room without the ceremony of knocking.

Montgomery had turned up the gas on rising, and by its light he noticed that the servant's face was white with terror.

"Oh, Mr. Montgomery!" he gasped.

"Well, what is it?" Angus said, coolly, drawing on his first boot.

"The fire—sir!" cried the servant, panting for breath.

"Deuced near, isn't it? They're kicking up an awful row in the street," and Angus drew on the other boot.

"Near! *our* house is on fire!"

"The devil it is!" exclaimed Angus, astonished.

"Yes, sir, and both stairways are in flames. Our escape is cut off! We shall be burnt up!"

CHAPTER XXII.

MONTGOMERY FEELS THE BLOW.

"WHILE there is life, there's hope!" exclaimed Angus, not in the least dismayed.

Then he hastily pulled on his coat, dragged the sheets from his bed and placed them on his arm.

"Come, I'll show you how to escape!" he said.

Followed by the affrighted servant he went out into the entry.

The smoke was coming up the stairway in dense masses.

Angus could plainly hear the devouring flames crackling and hissing below.

Angus, though almost stifled by the smoke, led the way to the hall bedroom; the two were in the second story. The young man closed the door behind them as they entered the little room. Then he threw up the window and admitted the fresh air. The street was filled with a howling multitude, attracted by the fire.

The window was just over the porch that covered in the front door. The top of the porch was only some ten feet below the level of the window.

Montgomery dragged the bedstead up to the window, fastened one end of one of the sheets to it, and threw the rest of it out of the window.

By means of the sheet Montgomery and the servant descended, easily to the top of the porch.

Then Montgomery tied the second sheet to the first, and thus descended from the porch to the balcony in front of the house.

Montgomery's clear head and cool nerve had saved both himself and his companion.

The two stood in the street and watched the fire.

It had gained such headway before the arrival of the engines that the efforts of the firemen were directed solely to saving the adjoining buildings.

As Montgomery stood among the crowd gazing at the burning building and wondering what the next stroke of ill-luck would be, a hand was laid upon his shoulder.

He turned and found himself face to face with the insurance agent who had written his policy.

"I'm sorry for you, Mr. Montgomery," said the agent.

"Yes, my ill-luck is coming all together," replied Montgomery, with a clouded brow.

"Deuced unlucky!" exclaimed the insurance agent, who was a portly little man, full of life and bustle; "by the way, do you know that I've noticed as a remarkable fact in this world, that when a man does have bad luck, it generally comes all together? It's like a wheel running in a rut; it takes a long time to get it out."

"That's very true, Mr. Hindle," Montgomery said, thoughtfully.

"I've always found it so."

"Another strange fact relating to this calamity. I put my policy in my pocket yesterday, intending to come down to your office and speak about a renewal," Montgomery said.

"Pity you didn't—I speak now as a friend, not as an insurance agent," Hindle observed.

"Why, what difference does it make?" Montgomery asked, looking at Mr. Hindle with astonishment written on his face.

The insurance agent returned the look. He was as much astonished at Montgomery's speech as the young man had been at his.

"Well, your loss wouldn't have been quite so heavy," he said, slowly.

"It is not so very bad," replied Montgomery, somewhat puzzled to guess the meaning of the other.

"Not very bad!" exclaimed the agent, opening his eyes in wonder. "Why it will be a total loss."

"No!"

"No?"

"Of course not!" exclaimed Angus, wondering at the apparent stupidity of the insurance agent.

"But why not?" Hindle began to think that the loss of the young man had affected his brain.

"You are strangely forgetful, Mr. Hindle. You ought to be able to remember that I am insured for ten thousand; you wrote the policy."

"You, insured for ten thousand!" exclaimed Hindle, getting a little excited.

"Of course," replied Montgomery, unable to understand why his words should produce such an effect upon Hindle.

"You mean you *were* insured?"

"No, I don't mean any thing of the sort, I mean that I am insured for ten thousand dollars in the company that you represent. It was on the tenth of October, and to-day is only the sixth," Montgomery replied.

"Good heavens! Mr. Montgomery, your insurance expired *yesterday*. It was out on the *fifth* instead of the tenth. I made a memorandum." And the agent showed it to the young man written in his note-book.

Montgomery read it with a calm smile.

"You have made a mistake, Mr. Hindle; my policy does not expire until the tenth. I am sure of it."

"And I am sure that it expires on the fifth," said the agent, doggedly.

"Now, I can convince you that you are wrong because I've the policy in my pocket. I was going to call upon you yesterday in regard to it and took it from my safe, but for some reason I neglected it."

Then Montgomery took the policy from his pocket, opened it, and by the light of the flames from the burning house, read aloud:

"Tenth of October!"

There was just a little bit of triumph in Montgomery's voice. He had been sure that the agent was wrong and that he was right about the date.

"Good heaven bless me!" exclaimed Hindle in great excitement, "I can't be crazy—losing my memory. Allow me to look at it, please."

Then Hindle adjusted his eye-glasses and examined the paper, carefully.

"Good gracious, Mr. Montgomery!" cried the agent in astonishment.

"What's the matter?" asked Angus, astonished at his manner.

"Why this date has been altered!"

"What?"

"Of course! I will take my oath that I never made an *h* like that in all my life. My *h*'s always have a loop at the top, this one is straight up and down."

"The date altered!" said Montgomery, slowly, and his face looked gloomy and sad as he spoke.

"Yes, I knew I could not be mistaken, for I saw the date in looking over the books yesterday."

"Altered!" Montgomery repeated, slowly. His mind was vainly groping in the dark for some clue to this strange mystery.

"Yes; why, look yourself; can't you detect a difference in the writing? The word tenth is a clumsy imitation of my handwriting, but not a good one by any means."

Montgomery examined it carefully. He saw how true the words of the agent were. The date had indeed been altered.

"But, how could this be done?" he asked, in blank dismay.

"Easy enough," replied Hindle; "the fifth has been taken out by acid and the other date written in its place."

"Yes, I have heard of such things," said Montgomery, slowly and mechanically. His thoughts were far away.

"But I can not understand the reason for such a stupid proceeding," said Hinkle, in wonder; "it is of no avail, for the alteration can be detected at a single glance."

"Yes, it is plain enough to me now, and yet I did *not* notice it before," Montgomery replied.

"You had no suspicion that there was any thing wrong about it, that's the reason. You only looked at it carelessly. But, as I said before, this appears to me to be a crime committed without any object."

"Not so to me; I can see the object plain enough," and Montgomery's brows grew dark as he spoke.

"And what is it?" asked Hinkle, in wonder.

"To ruin me!"

"Ruin you?"

"Yes," responded Montgomery, hoarsely; "I have foes who are striking at me from the dark, and the blows are not aimed at my breast, but, coward-like, they strike at my back. The date of the policy was altered so that I should not have it renewed. And then, the moment that it expired they set fire to my home. I was warned, but I did not heed the warning, blind fool that I was! But now, I'll fight these treacherous villains!"

The insurance agent looked at Montgomery with wonder visibly expressed in every line of his fat face. He began to think that the young man's misfortunes had turned his brain.

"Secret foes?" he stammered.

"Yes, but I'll hunt them down!" exclaimed the young man, fiercely.

"You think the house was set on fire?"

"Yes."

"Why not have the people arrested that you suspect?"

"My suspicion is not proof," replied Montgomery, moodily.

"Can I aid you in any way?"

"No; I must fight the battle alone. Good-night," and Montgomery left the agent abruptly, and disappeared in the crowd. Mr. Hinkle looked after the young man in astonishment.

"Well, of all the mixed up pieces of business that I have ever had any thing to do with, this is the worst!" he ejaculated.

"Secret foes"—"blows in the dark"—"I'm mystified."

And then the agent turned his attention again to the burning house.

Two men, dressed roughly in dark clothes, their coat-collars pulled up around their necks, and their felt hats pulled down over their foreheads, standing in a dark angle of the adjoining buildings, concealed by the shadow, had overheard all the conversation that had passed between the insurance agent and Angus Montgomery.

After the agent and Montgomery had separated, the men came slowly from the dark corner and walked down the street.

"Did you hear what Montgomery said?" said the shorter of the two, and by the voice we recognize him as Tulip Roche.

"Yes," replied the other, thoughtfully. Tulip's companion was Lionel O'Connell.

"He guessed that he has secret enemies."

"Yes."

"Why should he guess that he has enemies?"

"He is not a fool. These blows are coming too quick and heavy upon him to be the result of chance alone. Besides, the alteration of the insurance policy, that could only have one meaning."

"We shall have to be on our guard, lest he discover that these blows come from us."

"How can he discover it?" O'Connell asked. "It is the tool that betrays the master; but we, so far, have used none. We have done our work ourselves. Each blow that we have dealt him has come from our own hands."

"You forget the countess," Tulip said.

"She will never betray Lionel O'Connell," replied the chief of the League, decidedly. "If we are true to ourselves there is but little danger."

"But, this warning that he says he has received?"

"I understand to what he refers," said O'Connell—"a mysterious woman, who called herself the White Witch, has, by some strange accident, hit upon our very scheme. Of course it is by accident alone, for our secret has been kept, I am sure, by all of us. This meeting took place at the masquerade in Newport, on the very night that we formed our league."

"It is a strange coincidence," said Tulip, thoughtfully.

"Yes; her warning and the alteration of the date has opened Montgomery's eyes."

"Perhaps he will escape us even now," suggested Tulip.

"What, escape from the lure of Leone's dark eyes? ah, no! Why, Tulip, he is so infatuated that he would dare a river of fire for her sake! A man of Montgomery's cool, quiet temperament, once inflamed by passion's fires, is not easily restrained. Our next blow is more powerful than all the rest combined, and less likely to fail. Mark my words and see if events do not prove them true."

The net was closing, slowly but surely, around the doomed man.

CHAPTER XXIII.

TWO FRIENDS FOR THE SINKING MAN.

FOUR days after the burning of Montgomery's house, he had his affairs settled, and knew how he stood in the world. He found that the insurance agent had spoken the truth, and that his insurance policy had indeed been altered. There was no help for it, and the destruction of the house made him just ten thousand dollars poorer. So Montgomery sold the lot whereon the house stood, turned into money his stocks and deposited the proceeds in one of the down-town banks. He determined to put his valuables out of the reach of his enemies, if enemies he had.

Montgomery had thought long and earnestly over the strange prophecy of the woman who had called herself the White Witch. He could hardly believe that he had such determined foes. It seemed more like a romance than reality. Yet, one fact he could not dispute and that was, that, within

a few weeks, he had lost nearly all his fortune. Loss after loss had fallen heavily upon him. It might be, though, that it was only the caprice of fortune.

Montgomery was puzzled.

As he pondered the subject over, a bright idea flashed across his mind.

If he had foes, they were fighting him secretly and in the dark; why should not he try the same mode of warfare?

He thought of the shrewd little Englishman who had rescued him from the den in Baxter street. He would be just the man for an ally! He was, apparently, shrewd and keen-witted.

Montgomery determined to seek him, and if possible engage his services. He remembered the address the stranger had given; and so, one fine afternoon, acting on the idea, he found himself in front of the little English ale-house in Houston street, that displayed for its sign a bunch of grapes.

Entering the house, Montgomery inquired for Mr. Pipgan.

A waiter conducted him up-stairs to a little room where sat the Englishman smoking a long pipe.

Pipgan instantly recognized his visitor. He had an excellent memory.

"Sit down, sir; proud to see you," he said, offering a chair.

"You remember me, then?" Montgomery said, seating himself.

"Yes, sir; it ain't often that I forgets a face; leastways, one that I care to remember," replied Pipgan, quickly.

"Of course you remember the circumstances that led to our acquaintance?"

"I hope I ain't putting it too strong when I say, rayther!" exclaimed Pipgan.

"I offered you a reward, but you refused to accept any thing—"

"And I'm just the same now," interrupted Pipgan. "Why, bless you, I'd 'a' done as much for almost any one. I never saw a man in a tight place in all my life that I didn't feel like helping him out."

"From what I saw of you on the occasion I became impressed with the belief that you are a cool, shrewd fellow."

Pipgan grinned at the compliment.

"Well, I can't say, you know," he said, in a reflective sort of way. "I ain't a block of ice, nor a cucumber, you know; but I think that I take things easy; and, as for being shrewd, I know just about enough to enable me to take care of No. 1."

"You have already done me one service, and now I have come to ask another."

"All right; I'll do it if I can. As you Americans say, 'go ahead!'"

"If you remember, on our previous meeting, I took you to be a detective officer?"

"Yes, of course," and Pipgan indulged in a quiet laugh.

"Just to think of a little fellow like me being taken for a detective!" and Pipgan laughed again.

"I judged so by the coolness and courage that you displayed."

"Why, bless you!" cried Pipgan, "it didn't require any courage for to frighten the 'Mouse'—"

"Eh? did you know the fellow's name?" asked Montgomery, in astonishment.

"Why—that is—yes, I saw him once across the water," said Pipgan, a little confused.

"Ah, I see! you remembered him?"

"Yes, of course," replied the Englishman. "Well, as I was a-saying, anybody jumping into the room would have startled him. There ain't pluck in chaps of his kidney."

"Now I require a second service at your hands. I come to you, because, from what little I have seen of your character I judge that you are just the man that I require."

"What is it?" Pipgan asked.

"Before I can explain, I must tell you a little of my history."

Pipgan laid down his pipe and prepared to listen attentively.

"One month ago, at a masquerade ball at Newport—that's the watering place, you know—"

Pipgan nodded; he did know.

"A woman dressed all in white and her face covered with a white mask, accosted me," continued Montgomery. "She said that she was called the White Witch, and she predicted that, within one month or one year, money, love and friends would all forsake me."

"Yes, of course, 'one month or one year,' that's what they always say," observed Pipgan.

"But, the strangest part of the whole affair is that the prediction is coming true," Montgomery said.

Pipgan looked at his visitor in surprise.

"What?"

"The month has not yet expired—though it is nearly at an end—and I have lost two-thirds of my fortune."

"The dickens you have!" cried the Englishman, with a prolonged whistle.

"The woman that I was engaged to be married to, has quarreled with me and the love has gone."

Pipgan elevated his eyebrows in astonishment.

"But the friends?"

"As yet, I haven't lost any, but the prediction referred particularly to one man, and if all the words of the mysterious woman come as true as those that referred to the money and love, the loss of my friend was the first blow that fell upon me."

"Then you haven't said all that the White Witch said."

"No; she further told me that there were three men who hated me and desired my ruin; that these three men had united together to compass their object."

"Why, this is just like one of the stories that they prints in the weekly papers!" exclaimed Pipgan, in amazement.

"Yes, but this story—this fable, seems to be turning into reality, and very quickly, too," replied Montgomery.

"A league of three," said Pipgan, thoughtfully.

"Yes, and she told me that one of this league was this man who has been my bosom friend."

"Well, it's an ugly case," said the Englishman, thoughtfully; "what do you want me to do?"

"Find out whether this man is my friend or my foe."

"It will be a difficult job. I don't see how I can do it," said Pipgan, with a shake of the head.

"Dog his footsteps; find out who his associates are," replied Montgomery, eagerly.

"Well, I'll try; but, I don't think that there's the least chance of success," said the Englishman, doubtfully.

"Make the attempt. I will pay well for the service!" exclaimed Montgomery, eagerly.

"Time enough to speak about paying after I've tried," replied Pipgan, carelessly. "What's his name?"

"Tulip Roche; here in this envelope you will find a paper on which I have written all that I know in regard to his habits and friends; it also contains his address. It may aid you." And Montgomery gave the envelope to the Englishman.

"Tulip! what a queer name!"

"Yes; it was a whim of his father. When he was born, on his left breast, just over the heart, was a mark shaped like tulip flower."

"Well, I'll do the best I can."

"When shall I see you again?"

"Say three days. By that time I shall be able to tell whether I can succeed or not."

"Shall I meet you here?"

"Yes, and if it's convenient, make it just about this time."

"Very well."

And so the interview ended.

Montgomery walked up Broadway, his eyes bent thoughtfully upon the pavement.

Despite the action that he had taken, he could not bring himself to believe that Tulip Roche, the man that he had loved like a brother, had turned against him.

"I have acted like a coward in setting a spy on him," he muttered, as he walked on; "yet, it is better to prove him innocent than to have these thoughts of his guilt haunting my brains."

Then Montgomery, happening to raise his eyes, beheld Agatha Chauncy coming down the street.

The instant she perceived Montgomery she came straight to him with outstretched hand.

"Oh, Mr. Montgomery!" she exclaimed, "I wanted to see you so much!"

The sight of the girl caused a thrill of pain to shoot, rocket-like, through Montgomery's heart. She brought back to his memory the woman that he was striving so hard to forget. True, he now despised Frances Chauncy, yet often when alone, in the silent hours, when memory was busy in his brain, her face would rise before him, and, like the specter in the romance, would not down at his bidding. Then the thought would come, how happy he might have been in her love.

"Indeed?" Montgomery said, vailing with a courtly smile the agony that was in his heart.

"Yes; I've something that I want to say to you," and Agatha seemed strangely embarrassed as she spoke.

"I'm all attention," Montgomery replied, wondering what she had to say.

"I can't tell you here, with all this crowd passing," she said, hurriedly. "Will you walk down this street with me a little way?"

The two were standing on the corner of Amity street.

"Certainly," Montgomery said.

Getting out of crowded Broadway they walked down the side street.

"Mr. Montgomery—excuse the question—but are you and Frances good friends?" she said, abruptly.

"No," Montgomery replied, quietly.

"Oh, I am so sorry!" And as Montgomery looked in Agatha's face he saw that there were tears in her brilliant dark eyes.

"So am I," returned Montgomery, honestly.

"But, isn't there a possibility that you may become friends again?" she asked.

"No," Montgomery replied, quietly but firmly.

"Oh, don't say that!"

"But it is the truth. Is this the subject that you wished to speak to me about?"

"No—I—" and Agatha hesitated and blushed up to her temples. Montgomery looked at her in astonishment.

"What is it, then?"

"Mr. Montgomery, will you be offended if I—I mean if—I—oh! it's so hard to say what I do mean!" and Agatha blushed deeper than before.

"I do not think that you will offend me by any thing that you will say," Montgomery replied.

"Well, then I'll speak—now don't be angry—I heard some one say that you had lost nearly all your fortune, and that—well, I thought that perhaps you might need money, and—and I've twenty thousand dollars that papa left me in the bank, and—" and here Agatha broke down completely.

Montgomery was deeply affected.

"Agatha, you're the best-hearted girl in the world!" he exclaimed. "I understand what you mean, and if I really needed it, I'd take the money that you offer me in the same spirit that you tender it; but, thank Heaven! I'm not quite ruined yet."

"Oh, I'm so glad!" and Agatha's eyes danced with joy. "But, Mr. Montgomery, are you never coming to our house again?"

Montgomery shook his head.

"But why not? both aunty and myself would be glad to see you; please come!"

"Perhaps I will." Montgomery could not withstand the appealing look of Agatha's dark eyes.

"I won't detain you any longer; mind, you've promised to come; good-by." And with happiness beaming in her face she left him.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE PASSION WE CALL LOVE.

MONTGOMERY watched her retreating form for a few moments in silence. Like her sister Frances, he had guessed the secret hid in the young girl's heart.

"She loves me," he murmured; "I am sure of it; I read the truth in her eyes. Why is it, in all my life, that the girls I love never love me in return, and that I do never love the ones that do love me? That is a mystery," and Montgomery shook his head sadly. "She is pretty; prettier far than her sister, Frances, yet I do not, can not love her. What a noble heart she has, to offer so freely to share her fortune with me because she thought I was poor!" And Montgomery looked in admiration after the girl. "What splendid eyes she has. By Jove!" and a sudden thought occurred to the young man; "what a resemblance there is between her eyes and the eyes of the White Witch! And now I think of it; if this strange woman is one of Agatha's friends, it is not wonderful that she should guess that the engagement between Frances and myself would be broken off, for Agatha probably discovered, long ago, that her sister did not care for me. This would be an easy and a natural explanation of the riddle. But, the loss of my fortune! Ah, no, it is clearly impossible that any human being could have foreseen that. Will this mystery ever be revealed? I suppose I'm a fool to allow it to worry me in this manner, but I can not help it."

Then Montgomery walked up the street to Broadway again.

Joining the busy life-stream, he walked slowly along, his mind busy with the events of the past few weeks.

He reached Union Square. He was walking listlessly on, without an object, when he thought of the beautiful French girl, Leone.

For the past week her conduct had puzzled him. At first she had seemed to look with eyes of favor upon him, but, at his last visit, he had noticed that she seemed abstracted and full of reserve.

Montgomery resolved to visit Leone.

"I might as well learn my fate at once. I am fortune's foot-ball; perhaps another stroke of disaster is in store for me? Well, I shall get used to this sort of thing if it keeps on much longer," he said, coolly.

Arriving at the hotel, he sent up his card, and in a few minutes the servant conducted him to the parlor of the "Countess."

Leone rose to receive him, a glad look in her eyes that did not escape Montgomery's notice.

"You are quite well?" he said.

"Oh, yes," she replied, quickly. "Pray be seated."

Seated, Montgomery surveyed the beautiful girl before him with eager eyes. Never before had she looked so lovely.

"I am glad you came," she said, the charming, innocent smile lighting up her face as the sunbeams light up the moon.

"Why so?" Montgomery asked, his heart beating wild with delight.

"Because I am so lonely."

"Lonely?"

"Yes," and Leone sighed as she spoke.

"That is strange."

"No, I am almost friendless in this great city."

"Friendless! you? so—pardon me if my tongue speaks the words that are in my heart—so beautiful."

Leone cast down her eyes and a slight blush crimsoned her cheeks at his ardent tone.

"I have very few acquaintances," she said, as if wishing not to notice the compliment.

"Is it possible?"

"Mr. O'Connell and yourself are the only visitors I have."

"You knew Mr. O'Connell before coming to New York?"

"Yes."

"Is it possible that we two lucky mortals are the only ones that enjoy your society?"

"Yes."

"Do you know that I ought to be very jealous of Mr. O'Connell, or rather that I would be jealous if I had the right to be so?" said Montgomery, earnestly.

"Jealous," murmured the girl, and again she cast down her eyes and the blush mantled her cheeks.

"Yes."

"Why?" and Leone knew what the answer would be when she asked the question.

"Because, Leone, I love you!"

"You love me," she said, slowly, and her eyes sought the floor.

"Yes," and Montgomery rose from his seat, approached the low easy-chair in which Leone sat, and leaned carelessly on the back of it. "I have loved you, Leone, almost from the moment when first we met. I deemed it an infatuation, struggled against it; but, it is more powerful than my will; it conquers me. Leone, I love you, honestly, sincerely, truly. You are not angry with me for loving you?"

"No," murmured the girl, softly.

"Oh, I thank you for that one little word," and Montgomery knelt by her side and looked with his bright, manly eyes into the downcast face of the girl. "You see, I stoop to conquer," he said, merrily. "Leone, can't you give me one little word—bid me hope?"

"You say you love me, Angus?" Leone said, slowly, with a shy glance into the earnest face of the kneeling lover.

It was the first time that she had ever called him by his Christian name, and the heart of the young man gave a great leap for joy when the sound fell upon his ears.

"Say it, Leone? I will swear it, if you like!" Montgomery exclaimed, impulsively.

"No; there isn't any need of that; I believe you," Leone said, quickly.

"And may I hope?" pleaded the lover.

"But, Angus, have you considered?"

"Considered what?" he asked.

"The shortness of our acquaintance; you have only known me a little while."

"Yet I feel that I am as well acquainted with you as though I had known you from childhood!" he said, quickly. "You are the best and most beautiful of women!"

"Are you quite sure of it?" she asked, shyly.

"One look at your face would convince any one."

"Of what? that I am pretty or good?"

"Both!"

"I may have a very bad temper."

Montgomery shook his head.

"You do not believe it?"

"No."

"Not even if I say so?"

"Yes, but you do not say so," said Montgomery, quickly.

A charming smile rewarded the lover's faith.

"But, remember that I am almost a stranger to you; how can you tell what my past life has been?"

"I believe you to be a good, pure girl," answered Montgomery, quickly.

"Suppose some one should tell you to the contrary?"

"I would not believe them!" exclaimed Montgomery, firmly.

"But, if they produced proofs?"

For a moment Montgomery was staggered. A cloud gathered on his brow, but a single glance into the beautiful face of Leone and the cloud vanished even as the morning mists fly before the sun.

"Why do you torture me with such questions?" he asked, reproachfully.

"Is it not my duty to tell you the truth?" asked the girl, turning her face away from the gaze of her lover.

"The truth, yes; but what you have hinted at is not the truth. You do not say that it is, do you?"

"And if I say that it is?" murmured Leone, still keeping her face averted from Montgomery's gaze.

"If! Leone, look me in the face, please."

Slowly, Leone turned her face toward her lover.

Montgomery looked up into the beautiful face; saw the great, black eyes shining, full of truth and love, lustrous with emotion. To his mind it was the face of a saint rather than that of a mortal.

Montgomery took her hands in his. She yielded them up without resisting. The soft, white hands, so perfect in their beauty, lay motionless within his broad palms.

"Now," he said, "palm to palm and eye to eye, look me in the face and tell me that you are unworthy of my love, if you can?"

A moment Leone seemed to struggle to reply; the beautiful face became sad; the soft eyes looked pleadingly into his; the muscles of the mouth quivered, and then her head sunk down upon her breast avoiding Montgomery's gaze.

"You do not speak!" Montgomery exclaimed, softly; "you can not say to me that you are not worthy of my love."

"You are right," murmured Leone, "I can not."

"And I know the reason."

"You do?" and Leone raised her head in surprise.

"Yes."

"It is because—because I can not give you pain!"

"Leone!" exclaimed Montgomery, half in reproach, "it is because it would not be the truth."

"And you love me even when I try to dissuade you from loving me?" she murmured.

"Yes; were all the world to tell me that you were false, and your voice alone say the contrary, I would believe you against all the world!"

"Oh, Angus!" she murmured, faintly.

"You love me?" he exclaimed, softly, rising and still clasping her by the hands.

"Yes."

And in an instant she was pillowed on his breast.

Gently, he raised the little head with its wealth of ebony hair. One long, lingering kiss, heart to heart, soul to soul, and Leone—her bosom throbbing wild with joy, weak as a child—clung fondly to Montgomery's breast—his promised wife.

The shades of the evening warned the lovers that the hour of parting had come.

A dozen kisses, each one sweeter than the former, and they parted.

As Montgomery descended the stairs, his brains aching with joy, one of the servants accosted him.

"Dis yer Mr. Montgomery?"

"Yes."

"Letter, sar."

Montgomery took it; the handwriting was a strange one. He opened it and started with surprise. The letter was signed, "THE WHITE WITCH."

CHAPTER XXV.

THE WITCH'S LETTER.

MONTGOMERY read the letter in astonishment. It was brief.

"Did I predict truly at Newport or not? Already the best part of your fortune is gone. The love that you thought so true has proved to be a hollow mockery. Are you convinced, or are you blind? Even now, another blow is aimed at you. Are you prepared to receive it? No! With uncovered head you bow to it; nay more, you invite it—beg the stroke that will crush you to the earth. You rush madly to your doom. I pity and would save you, if you will heed my warning. Will you do so? You shall give me your answer to-night. Be at the Central Park gate, Seventh avenue and Fifty-ninth street, to-night, at nine o'clock. I will meet you there. If you value your future happiness, come."

"THE WHITE WITCH."

So read the letter that the young man perused. The mystery seemed to be thickening around him.

"Who can this mysterious personage be?" he asked, in wonder. "How can she watch my footsteps in this way? I must find the servant; perhaps from him I can learn who gave him the letter."

Acting at once on the thought, Montgomery ascended the stairs again. After giving him the letter the servant had gone up-stairs.

Montgomery had not noticed the face of the man particularly, but he had no doubt that he could tell him again at a glance.

In the corridor at the head of the stairs, Montgomery met one of the servants. A single look into his face and the young man thought that he recognized the person who had given him the letter.

"Who gave you that letter for me?" Montgomery asked, accosting the servant.

The colored waiting-man looked at Montgomery in astonishment.

"Did yer speak to me, sar?" he asked.

"Yes; who gave you the letter that you handed me just now?" repeated Montgomery.

"Letter, sar?" said the servant, rolling up his eyes in astonishment.

"Yes, the one that you gave me a moment ago; you remember, Mr. Montgomery's letter." The young man was sure that he had got hold of the right man, for his voice was familiar as well as his face.

"Bress de Lord! I didn't guve yer no letter, boss!" exclaimed the negro.

"Yes you did," persisted Montgomery, who guessed at once that the man had been bribed to silence.

"By golly, boss! I hain't seen no letter!" said the servant in wonder.

"You have probably forgotten the little circumstance," and as Montgomery spoke, he took a dollar greenback from his pocketbook and gave it to the servant. "Don't you think you can remember the letter now?" he asked.

"Much obliged, boss," said the colored man, pocketing the greenback, with a grin that extended his mouth from ear to ear.

"And now, who gave you the letter?"

"I 'clare to goodness, boss, I don't know nuffin 'bout de letter!" was again replied.

Montgomery's brows contracted. He saw that he had not bid high enough.

"Hark ye, my friend," he said, "will a five-dollar note induce you to tell me who gave you that letter?"

"I don't know nuffin 'bout de letter," replied the man, persisting in his denial. "I 'speck you's got hold of de wrong chile, boss."

Then the office bell sounded.

"Dat's me!" exclaimed the servant; "much obliged 'or de dollar, boss," and he hurried down-stairs.

Montgomery was perplexed.

He was sure that he had spoken with the very man who had given the letter into his hands.

"The fellow must be well paid," he muttered, "to keep the secret so faithfully. How the deuce can I discover who this mysterious woman is?" Montgomery pondered over the difficult question. "By Jove!" he said, suddenly, "the best way is to keep the appointment, made in the letter, of this White Witch. The Seventh avenue gate, Central Park," he said, reflectively, and referring to the letter, "at nine o'clock to-night. Good, I'll be there. What the deuce can the new misfortune be that is hanging over my unlucky head? Ah, well! time will tell, I suppose. Now, if this shrewd Englishman can only learn the truth as to whether Tulip Roche is friend or foe, that will be one riddle solved."

Montgomery descended again to the street.

As the young man stood in front of the hotel, meditating upon the strange events of the past few hours, a gentleman coming up the street attracted his attention.

The gentleman was of that class that is usually called a "swell."

He evidently was an Englishman. He wore the shortest of coats and the tightest of pantaloons; the material was black velvet. In his hand he carried a little cane. A glossy silk hat, white in color and shining like satin, adorned his head. A pair of eye-glasses were perched upon his nose.

Montgomery could not help noticing him as he approached, his appearance was so peculiar.

Then Montgomery suddenly discovered that the face of the stranger was familiar to him. This rather astonished him, and he was still more astonished at the stranger bowing, evidently to him, and approaching with outstretched hand.

Montgomery looked at him in wonder.

"The stranger paused and surveyed Montgomery through his glasses.

"Well, governor, how is this for high? as you Americans say!" he said.

Montgomery started in amazement.

It was the voice of Chris Pipgan!

"Pipgan!" Montgomery cried, in wonder.

"All correct between you and I," replied Pipgan, with a wink; "but, to the world at present, I am Charles Maltravers, you know, an imported swell, just over to this 'blasted country, you know.' A perfect swell, you know; in fact, as we say in the London music halls, I'm a regular 'howler.'"

Montgomery could not help laughing at Pipgan's imitation of the English fop.

The change that the Englishman had made in his personal appearance by simply putting on a "nobby" suit of clothes and curling his yellow hair in little crispy curls all over his head, was astonishing.

"Your disguise is really wonderful; I didn't know you," said Montgomery.

"Pretty tidy get-up, eh, governor? I put it to you if it isn't?" and Pipgan surveyed himself complacently.

"Excellent; but the reason?"

"So as to keep my eyes on the bird that you set me to watch," replied Pipgan. "I couldn't very well follow him in the high society that he frequents in my old togs. Bless you, he'd 'a' tumbled to it in a minute."

"But I don't understand—"

"Plain as a pike-staff, governor!" cried the Englishman. "I want you to introduce me to the gentleman as Charles Maltravers, you know, just from across the water, familiarly called Champagne Charlie by my friends, you know; a regular howler and all that sort of thing, you know." And Pipgan gave another capital imitation of the style of the English fop—the character that he was representing.

"And your idea is?"

"To wriggle myself into his confidence, if I can; at any rate, I can circulate around his haunts without exciting any suspicion, and so keep my eyes upon him. As I told you, governor, when I took the job, I don't think that I can succeed, but I can try."

"Mortal man can not do more," observed Montgomery. "By the way, you remember that I told you of a mysterious woman who called herself the White Witch?"

"Yes, of course; the one that predicted all sorts of things concerning you?"

"Exactly," replied Montgomery. "Read this note; it was put in my hands a moment ago by one of the servants of the hotel here," and Montgomery gave the letter to Pipgan.

Montgomery had replaced the note in the envelope, which was a plain white one, and simply addressed:

"ANGUS MONTGOMERY,
Present."

The moment that Pipgan's eye fell upon the writing a puzzled look appeared upon his face. A man less accustomed to conceal his emotions than the cool, cautious Englishman, would probably have started.

Montgomery noticed his puzzled look.

"What is it?" he asked.

"Oh, nothing," said Pipgan, carelessly; "it's a pretty hand, ain't it?"

"But it looks more like the handwriting of a man than that of a woman," Montgomery remarked.

"Pre-cisely the idea that struck me," said the Englishman, with a peculiar smile.

"Is the hand familiar to you?"

"To me!" exclaimed Pipgan, apparently astonished. "Why, how could it be? But let's see what's inside."

The Englishman opened the letter and read it through carefully.

"What do you think of it?" asked Montgomery, after waiting for Pipgan to speak out, and finding that he did not.

"Well, I don't know," said the Englishman, slowly. "It sounds like the letter of a friend. Are you going to keep the appointment?"

"I have not yet decided."

"I would if I were you."

"Why?"

"Because it won't do any harm, if it don't do any good. You say that what the White Witch predicted has come true?"

"Partly so."

"Then go and see her by all means," said Pipgan, quickly. "What sort of a looking woman is this White Witch?"

"Well, I can hardly tell," replied Montgomery. "I only saw her for a few minutes, and then she was masked and disguised in such a way that she baffled recognition."

"Was she tall—that is, a good-sized woman, not little?"

"Yes."

"Rayther slender form?"

"Yes."

"Large black eyes?"

"Yes." Montgomery was astonished.

"And her voice?"

"Disguised so that I can not describe it. But it is possible that you know the girl or woman—whatever she is—that is playing the part of this sibyl?" Montgomery asked, in wonder.

"I know her?" exclaimed Pipgan, opening his eyes in astonishment. "Why, how could I?"

"But your description is exact."

"I was only guessing, Yankee fashion, at what I thought she might look like," replied the Englishman.

"Oh!" exclaimed Montgomery, disappointed; "I fancied that perhaps you had a clue."

"Oh, did you?" said Pipgan, quietly.

"Then you advise me to keep this appointment?"

"Yes, and I'll go with you."

"With me?"

"Not exactly with you, but after you."

"For what object?"

"To find out what the White Witch is. I'll keep behind you, out of sight. Then, after your interview is over, and you separate, I will follow her, and once I get on her track, leave me alone to find out who and what she is."

"A capital idea!" cried Montgomery, warmly. "I confess I would give a great deal to know who this mysterious woman is that has such a knowledge of my affairs. But to-night may reveal the truth."

Then the two parted.

CHAPTER XXVI.

O'CONNEL SCENTS THE SLEUTH-HOUND.

MONTGOMERY went up the street, while Pipgan remained standing in front of the hotel.

"Well, jigger my buttons, if the affair isn't getting more and more complicated," Pipgan muttered, as he sucked the edge of his little cane. "Here I've come over the 'herring-pond' just to amuse myself a little—to get rid of business—and all of a sudden I find myself up to my eyes in work. Strange that I haven't received a cable dispatch, yet! Something must be wrong on the other side of the water. Can the proofs be wanting? It's some years since the affair happened."

And while the Englishman was meditating, Lionel O'Connel came up the street. He approached the hotel, his eyes fixed upon the ground. He was evidently in deep thought.

O'Connel, in his abstraction, did not notice Pipgan, who stood exactly in front of the door, until he nearly ran over him; then, finding that his progress was obstructed, he paused, raised his eyes, and looked the Englishman in the face.

"I beg your pardon, sir," O'Connel said, absently, hardly noticing the face of the man whom he was addressing.

"Don't mention it, you know," replied Pipgan, with the broadest English accent; and as he spoke, he stepped to one side to allow the other to pass.

The moment O'Connel heard the voice of the Englishman a peculiar gleam shot from his eyes. It was as quick as the flash of powder, and was gone in an instant; yet, quick and slight as it was, it did not escape the searching eyes of Pipgan.

"I really beg your pardon; I was absent-minded at the moment, and I did not notice you until I nearly ran against you." And while O'Connel was speaking, his eyes were fixed intently upon the face of the other.

Pipgan did not seem to notice the look.

"Don't mention it, you know, my boy; accidents will occur in the best regulated families, you know; yas," and Pipgan looked through his eye-glasses at O'Connel, and grinned like a huge ape.

An expression of disappointment passed rapidly over O'Connel's face. Pipgan's keen eyes again detected the look, though, as before, apparently, he saw it not.

O'Connel bowed and passed into the hotel.

"Strange, how familiar his voice sounded to me!" O'Connel muttered, as he ascended the stairs. "I could have sworn that I had heard it before, and from the quick thrill of fear that ran through my senses, I was convinced that it was the voice of one, who, in the past, has been hostile to me. But the face—the face is strange. I am getting childish to be startled by a voice."

Pipgan watched O'Connel ascend the stairs, with a shrewd smile upon his face.

"He didn't tumble to it, after all," the Englishman said, quietly. "My young friend has a good memory, but this 'stunning' suit and the eye-glasses—you know—were too much for him. What little game is he up to now? I must keep my eyes on him. He'll bear watching." And with this reflection, which undoubtedly would have caused O'Connel considerable uneasiness had he known of it, Pipgan sauntered into the billiard room attached to the hotel.

O'Connel proceeded up-stairs to Leone's apartments.

He could not account, even to himself, for the vague feeling of uneasiness that had come over him. The chance meeting with the stranger in front of the hotel, whose voice had sounded so familiar to him, had produced a strange effect upon him.

O'Connel found Leone seated by the window, gazing out, dreamily, upon the busy, bustling throng that crowded Broad-

way. She did not even turn from the window at O'Connell's entrance.

"It is only me, Leone," he said.

"Yes, I expected you," she replied, quietly.

"Oh, you did?"

"Yes."

"How could you tell who it was?"

"I have but two visitors—"

"And the other one, meaning Angus Montgomery, has been here, then?"

"Yes."

Leone still kept her face averted from O'Connell's gaze.

"What do you see in the street that is so interesting, Leone?" he asked, approaching her.

"Nothing."

"You are a foolish girl to look so long and earnestly upon nothing," O'Connell said, with a sneer, and, as he spoke, he drew a chair to him and sat down in it, facing the girl.

"Leone, have the kindness to transfer your attention from the outside world to your humble servant for a few minutes and you will greatly oblige the subscriber," O'Connell said, in a tone of mock politeness.

"Well?" and Leone turned her face from the window and looked, coldly, at O'Connell.

"Good; that is better," and then O'Connell surveyed the face of the girl for a few moments in silence.

"Why do you look at me so intently?" Leone asked.

"I am reading."

"Reading?"

"Yes, your face. It is very interesting," O'Connell said, a peculiar smile hovering—phantom-like—around the mouth.

"And what do you read there?"

"That you have obeyed my orders."

"Indeed?"

"Yes; Montgomery has been here to see you; he has told you that he loved you, and you have told him that he was loved in return."

"Are you sure of it?"

"Quite," O'Connell answered, coolly. "Why, the truth is as plainly written in your face as though the words were imprinted there. There is a joyous look in your flashing, dark eyes, a smile of happiness upon your lips, where, possibly, the perfume of his warm kiss, yet lingers. Don't try to deceive me, Leone. I have known you too long to be easily deceived."

"I have not denied the truth of your words," she said, slowly.

"And you are now Montgomery's promised wife?"

"Yes."

"Good!" and O'Connell rubbed his hands together, softly, as if in joy. "All then is as I wish. Leone, you have played your part well. You have kept your word with me and I will keep mine with you."

"You will release me from the bond that binds me to you?"

"Yes, you shall be free, your own mistress, no longer the slave of my will. Doesn't a bright vision of happiness arise before you?"

"Why should I dream of happy days to come?" the girl asked, slowly.

"Why should you not?" he said, in a tone of wonder.

"If the past has been dark and gloomy, is that a reason why the future should be also sad?"

"No, but—"

"But what?" he asked, impatiently. "You have won the love of Angus Montgomery; if the old saying is true, love is the whole of a woman's life; though with man, it is but the history of a day. You love and you are loved. What more can you ask?"

"You speak as if you thought that I intended to become Montgomery's wife," the girl said, her dark eyes flashing as she spoke.

"Of course," replied O'Connell, coolly; "you are not such an idiot as to refuse him?"

"I shall never be his wife," Leone replied.

"Are you mad?" O'Connell exclaimed.

"No, I am only just."

"Just!" and O'Connell's tone was sneering in the extreme.

"Yes, both to him and to myself," answered Leone, firmly.

"I promised you that I would try and make him love me; you compelled me to do so, for, by the word that I gave years ago, I am as a slave in your hands. But I will never deceive the man who has honored me with his love. After you release me from my promise, I will tell Angus Montgomery who and what I am."

"You're a fool!" exclaimed O'Connell, coarsely.

"Better a fool than to act a knavish part!" replied the girl, quickly.

"Well, it is your affair, not mine," O'Connell said, carelessly. "And now to business. You remember what I wished you to do?"

"Obtain Montgomery's check?"

"Yes, the check to be filled up by you."

"Suppose that he objects to this?"

"If he loves you, he will not," O'Connell replied.

"Lionel, why do you hate this man so bitterly?" asked the girl, suddenly.

"What is that to you?" replied O'Connell, coldly.

"You must have some reason."

"I have. Did you ever know me to do any thing without a reason?" he asked.

"Never," she replied; "you are cold and calculating; your heart must be marble, not flesh."

"Perhaps it is," he replied, with a light laugh. Then a sudden thought occurred to him. "Leone," he said, abruptly, "as I entered the hotel just now, a man stood in the doorway, whose face seemed strangely familiar to me."

"Well?"

"His face sent a cold chill through every vein, and you know, Leone, I am not easily agitated. Can you guess why this man's face should trouble me?"

"No," she replied, absently. She was hardly heeding his words; her thoughts were far away.

"It was because his face recalled to my mind the affair in England that so nearly cost me my life."

The girl started and a cloud came over his face as he spoke.

"Why should the face of this stranger remind you of that dreadful event?" she asked.

"That I can not tell; but the face had some connection with the affair."

"Ah!" and Leone started suddenly, as the exclamation broke from her lips.

"What's the matter?" O'Connell asked, noticing the strange expression upon her face.

"Your words have recalled to my mind something that I intended to tell you before, but I forgot to speak of it. Some time ago, a man, evidently an Englishman, came to the door and wished to know if I wanted to purchase a little dog that he had for sale."

"Well, what of that?" asked O'Connell, who saw nothing remarkable in the circumstance.

"When I asked the dog's name, he answered, that it was called Mally, short for Malper."

O'Connell could not repress an exclamation of surprise as the name fell upon his ears.

"Malper!" he muttered.

"Yes, I thought that the coincidence was strange. I did not let the man see that the name was familiar to me, and carelessly I said that the name was a strange one; he replied that it was the name given to the puppy by the man from whom he had bought it."

O'Connell remained silent for a few moments busy in thought.

"What was this man like?" he asked, suddenly.

"He was not quite so tall as you are; dressed common, but not shabby; keen gray eyes and light yellow hair."

"Any beard?"

"No."

"Was his hair curly?"

"No; straight."

"His face thin; rather a large nose?"

"Yes," she replied.

"Leone, the face of your dog-man is exactly the face of the man that I met just now at the hotel door, below; I am afraid that we are in danger."

A troubled look swept over the face of the girl.

"Then you think—"

"That a sleuth-hound is on our track!" he said, with fierce accent.

Leone shuddered and covered her face with her hands.

"Do not fear!" he cried; "leave my wits alone to get the better of this fellow who has tracked us over the broad ocean. He is hunting us; in turn, I'll hunt him. Don't fear; the danger is as yet far in the distance. Lose no time in getting Montgomery to sign the check. That done, I release you from your promise, and you are free to go where you like and with whom you like."

"Montgomery is coming to-morrow. I will try and carry out your wishes."

"Do so; I will come again to-morrow evening. Till then, good-by," and O'Connell left Leone to her own sad thoughts.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE WITCH APPEARS.

THE hands of Montgomery's watch marked ten minutes to nine when he arrived at the Central Park gate on Fifty-ninth street, at the head of Seventh avenue.

A new moon, slowly rising in the dark skies, shed a dim light over the earth.

The night air was chilly, and Montgomery drew his light overcoat closer around him as he felt the cold fingers of the night breezes.

"It is nearly time for my mysterious lady to come," he muttered, as he paced up and down before the gateway. "Who can it be that takes such an interest in my fortunes? The knowledge that she possesses, too, seems marvelous. Why, the whole affair is more like a romantic fiction or a wild dream than sober reality."

Then a sudden thought occurred to Montgomery, and he paused in his walk and looked carefully around him.

"I wonder if the Englishman is here?" he said, as he looked in vain for the figure of his spy.

"I don't see him. He may be concealed in the shrubbery inside the Park, though. Perhaps it is better for the success of our plan that I should not know where he is. I might possibly defeat his purpose by some awkwardness. Why the deuce don't she come? The wind is confounded chilly."

Then Montgomery again resumed his walk.

A distant bell sounded on the still night air.

Montgomery again examined his watch.

"Nine o'clock, exactly," he said. "Now, then, where is the White Witch?"

His gaze wandered up and down the street but no female form met his eyes.

"By Jove!" he cried, suddenly; "suppose this should happen to turn out to be a hoax? I never thought of that before. It would be a delightful joke if I walked up and down here for an hour or so and no one came. But, who would play such a jest on me? No, I must have patience. My mysterious Newport lady will probably appear soon."

And even as he spoke he caught sight of a female figure approaching on the Park sidewalk from the direction of Eighth avenue.

"I wonder if that is she?" Montgomery muttered, as he stopped by the gate and watched the woman who was approaching so rapidly.

"No White Witch this time, however," mused Montgomery as he noticed the dress of the woman.

A few minutes and the dark figure brushed by the young man.

"Follow me!" she said, in a voice evidently disguised, as she passed by Montgomery. Then she went through the gate and entered the Park.

Montgomery obeyed the command, and followed in her footsteps. He had recognized the voice of the White Witch.

As he followed her by the dim moonlight he was enabled to notice her carefully.

She was about the medium height, and habited in a waterproof cloak, that reached to her ankles and completely hid the dress beneath from sight. The hood of the cloak was pulled over her head, and a thick green veil concealed her face from view.

She was completely disguised; and, if she had been Montgomery's most intimate acquaintance, she could safely have defied his recognition.

Within the Park, the veiled woman took the path leading to the left, straight down the slope, passed through the archway, and ascended the little hill beyond.

On the crest of the slope she halted, cast a quick glance around, as if to assure herself that there were no listeners by, and then she turned to Montgomery, who had followed her without a word.

"We are secure from observation here," she said.

Montgomery noticed that the tones of the woman were very low, barely above a whisper, and that she was evidently trying to disguise her natural voice.

The thought flashed across his mind that she must be known to him, else why should she be so cautious.

The woman had looked carefully around her when she halted. No one besides themselves was in sight, yet she was mistaken when she said that no one observed them.

After the two had entered the gate and gone down the winding path, a man arose cautiously from behind a clump of bushes by the side of the path, that had concealed him from sight.

Quietly and carefully he followed in the footsteps of the two, tracking them as the wild beast tracks its prey, or the wily savage, on the western frontier, trails his victim.

The sound of the footsteps of the two, ringing out clear on the silence of the night, served as a guide to him.

The windings of the path concealed the pursued from the pursuer.

While the steps of the two resounded clearly on the still air, on the contrary, the man who followed moved like a ghost, and his steps fell upon the earth with all the stealth and silence of the cat.

Suddenly, the noise of the footsteps, that he was listening to so eagerly, ceased.

The watcher guessed at once that the two had halted.

With increased caution, bent almost double, he proceeded onward, keeping, as he moved, in the shade of the trees and bushes that lined the pathway.

Then, as he came to an abrupt turn of the path, he saw the figures of Montgomery and the veiled woman standing together, a hundred paces on.

The spy dropped upon his knees in the shadow of a tree.

For a moment he surveyed the scene before him. Then, as if having made up his mind as to the course that he should pursue, he left the path, and availing himself of the shelter afforded by the trees and bushes, he noiselessly, snake-like, stole, little by little, toward the spot where Montgomery and the veiled woman stood.

He advanced so cautiously, that the two had no suspicion that there was any one near them.

Within a dozen paces of the two, the spy found shelter under a bush, and there, crouched upon the ground like a huge toad, he listened attentively to their conversation.

"You received my note?" the veiled woman said.

"Yes," Montgomery replied. "It was hardly necessary to ask the question, for you see that I have kept the appointment."

"True; it is some weeks since we met at Newport; do you remember my words?" said the woman, still striving to disguise her voice.

"Yes," replied Montgomery, and as he spoke, he was vainly trying to remember when and where he had heard the voice of the veiled woman before, for that it was familiar to him, he was sure.

"Then, you have not forgotten the White Witch?"

"No," Montgomery replied.

"Have my words come true?" she asked.

"Now, if you are indeed a witch, you need not ask that question," Montgomery said.

"I see you still doubt my power."

"I have not said so."

"Not in words, true; but the manner of your speech implies the doubt."

"You should be a witch, indeed, for you guess my thoughts," Montgomery said.

"Now, I will answer the question that I asked. Some of my predictions have been fulfilled; the others will be."

"You are sure of it?" Montgomery asked, gravely.

"As sure as that I stand here," replied the White Witch firmly.

Montgomery was staggered by her manner.

"You do not speak. I trust that you are beginning to believe; would to Heaven that you would, and thus save yourself from the utter ruin that awaits you."

"Utter ruin!" exclaimed the young man, in wonder.

"Yes, utter ruin!" repeated the woman, quickly. "I predicted on our first meeting that you would lose friends, wealth, and love. I put love last, as the loss of it inflicts more anguish than that of wealth and friends combined. A man will see his fortune vanish with a smile, look calmly on the faithless friend's departure, and yet, the knowledge of the falsehood of the woman to whom he has given all the love in his nature, will tear his heart and make him loathe the world and all its creatures. You will not dispute the truth of my words, for your own heart tells you that they are not false."

"No, your words are true," Montgomery said, with a bitter accent.

"You have lost fortune, friends, and, dearer than either, the woman that you loved."

"To a certain extent, you are right. The love is utterly gone, and nearly all my fortune; but the friend—"

"Is a secret enemy!" said the woman, hastily. "He is one of the League of Three that are striking these terrible blows."

"The League of Three! yes, I remember now; you spoke of this league before, did you not?"

"Yes."

"But such a thing seems more like fiction than a sober, living truth. Leagues are of the dark ages, when might made right and the strong arm held what the strong arm took."

"And has the world changed greatly since the age you speak of?" demanded the veiled woman. "No! the strong arm still holds what it forcibly takes. The hand of iron still exists, but modern civilization has covered it with a kid-glove. In the olden time, mailed knights, at the head of armed warriors, seized castles and cities; they won them amid the shock of arms, in battles; they call their stealing, glory. In modern days, the knights have turned into gentlemen in broadcloth, shining boots, diamond-pins, and kid-gloves; they seize railroads, city charters, and fat contracts; their armed hosts are smooth-tongued lawyers, venial office-holders, and a corrupt press. They work in the dark, and their stealing is called speculation. The world has not changed; it has only covered its ugly face with a mask. Angus Montgomery, believe me when I tell you that these three men have sworn to ruin you! Ask your own judgment if my words are improbable. Have you never heard of combinations? Are they not made in party politics every year? Can all these blows that have fallen so heavily upon your head be the result of accident alone?"

"No; it does not seem probable," Montgomery replied, slowly.

"I have spoken truth!" exclaimed the woman, firmly.

"But why do these three men hate me so bitterly?" Angus asked.

"Because you are in their way, and they seek to remove you from it."

"Tell me the names of the three?"

"I can not," the veiled woman said, slowly.

"And why not?"

"Because I—but do not ask me for reasons," the White Witch said, imploringly.

"You know their names and yet will not reveal them to me?"

"I can not," again said the veiled woman, with anguish in her tones.

"Why not give me the reason for the refusal, then?"

"I am bound by a promise. I have almost broken that promised by revealing to you the existence of the league."

"Who are you?" asked Montgomery, suddenly.

"Do not ask me. I can not tell you that, either."

"You are not a stranger to me; I am sure of it. I will lift the veil from your face; then, I shall know you."

With uplifted hand, Montgomery advanced to the shriveled woman.

CHAPTER XXVIII

BEWARE!

THE spy, concealed behind the bush, lifted his head and peeped through the foliage.

As he moved, a dried twig snapped beneath his hand. A smothered exclamation came from his lips; he feared discovery. But, the apprehension was uncalled for. Montgomery and the veiled woman were so occupied in their interview, that a much louder noise than the mere crackling of the twig beneath the hand of the spy upon their meeting, would not have attracted their notice.

As Montgomery advanced with his hand raised as if by force to remove the shrouding veil that hid the features of

the unknown, with a quick movement she retreated from him.

With one hand she waved him back, while with the other she drew the veil down closer over her face.

"No, no, Angus Montgomery, you will not do that," she murmured, still evidently trying to disguise her voice as she had done throughout the interview.

"And why will I not?" demanded the young man, impatiently. "My losses have almost made me desperate. You have told me a strange—a wonderful story. How can I tell that you are my friend—you, who know so well the plans of my enemies? Am I not rather justified in believing that you, too, are a foe?"

"No; if I am your enemy why should I take the trouble to warn you?"

"So that I may know that it is mortals who are pushing me to the brink of ruin and not the decrees of fate. There is little satisfaction in striking a man unless he knows who gives the blow."

"Angus Montgomery, I protest to you by all that is good or holy in this world, that I am not an enemy—that is, I mean, that of my own free will I would rather die than wrong you even by a thought. I can not tell you more of the Three than I have already told you, for were I to do so I should betray the person from whom I received my information. You will not take the veil from my face, I am sure; you will respect the wish I express to remain unknown."

"And why are you sure of that?" asked the young man, pausing, irresolute.

"Because I know that Angus Montgomery is a gentleman."

Montgomery bit his lip. The blow struck home. He raised his hat politely, and bowed.

"I thank you for the compliment," he said; "you are right. I will not attempt to penetrate your disguise. I will be content to know you only as the White Witch."

"I should not have trusted myself alone with you here at this hour if I had not known your character," she said, softly.

Again the voice sounded familiar to Montgomery, and he would have sworn that he had seen the mysterious woman when her face was not covered.

"Forgive my rudeness; but—pardon the question—do I not know you?"

"Yes."

"Ah!" he cried, eagerly.

"I am the White Witch!" and she laughed low and merrily as she spoke.

"Enough; I will not try to detect who you are," said Montgomery, baffled, "yet I am sure that you are well known to me, and by another name than the fanciful one that you have given yourself."

"You are wrong; you do not know me," replied the veiled woman, quietly, a touch of sadness in her voice.

"No?"

"It is the truth; and perhaps you will never know me."

Montgomery was puzzled. He did not guess the double meaning of her words.

He forgot the old saying, that, "one never knows a woman until he has married her."

"Heaven has ordained that for a brief time our lines of life shall run side by side; how soon they will be separate, no one knows. I am trying to do you a service. It was for that that I sought you at the masquerade in Newport. I warned you of coming danger, but my warning did not save you from it."

"It was impossible to guard against the blows even with your warning. But, why have you sought me now? Are there more evils to fall upon me?"

"Yes, all my predictions have not been fulfilled," the White Witch answered.

"True, my fortune isn't all lost, but there's precious little left," Montgomery said, dryly.

"Your friend?"

"I have not yet proved him to be an enemy."

"That proof will be presented to you before the week is over," said the woman, quickly.

Montgomery was astonished.

"From whom do you receive this information?"

"I have already told you that to tell you would betray the one from whom I do receive it," replied the woman.

Montgomery felt that the affair was getting more and more mysterious.

"But, can you tell me one thing?"

"Ask; I will answer if I can," the veiled figure said.

"You told me at Newport that a certain lady would prove false to the vows that she had sworn to me," Montgomery said, with a little hesitation, for the subject was painful to him even now.

"Yes; were not my words true?"

"Too true," replied Montgomery, with a bitter accent.

"What I would ask is: how did you know—or guess—that she would prove false to me?"

"Shall I tell you frankly?"

"Yes."

"Even if it gives you pain?"

"I can bear it; go on," Montgomery replied firmly.

"Because she never loved you."

Montgomery, despite his self-control, winced at the words. It was not a pleasant thing to be told that the woman on whom he had lavished the purest and richest treasures of his heart, never cared for him; but he bore it bravely.

The veiled woman noticed the quiver of his lips and the momentary look of pain that came over his face.

"I knew that the truth would give you pain," she said, softly, and with an accent of pity in her tones.

"Never mind; it's like the skillful surgeon cutting beyond the wound to make the cure complete," he replied, quietly. "How could you know that she did not love me?"

"I can read her character in her face," replied the White Witch, slowly; and as she spoke, the thought occurred to Montgomery that the veiled woman was evading the question.

"In her face you read that she did not love me?" he queried.

"No, not that," replied the woman, "but in her face I read that she did not love any one, except herself. Her nature is a selfish one. It is not her fault. It was born in her. To love, one must have fire—passion. Think of Frances Chauncy's cold eyes; they are beautiful, but 'tis the beauty of colored glass; the fire that should give them life dwells not there. Another proof: her thin, passionless lips; and then, too, her wax-like face. Such a girl as she is can never love any one deeply. It is not in her. Angus, her cold, unsympathetic nature would chill your heart to ice, deaden the blood within your veins, and cause you to regret the day when you linked your fate with hers. Do not think that I would wrong her, even in thought, for Heaven knows that I have no wish to do so. You asked for the truth, and I have spoken it, perhaps too freely."

"No, no!" he exclaimed.

"I have only obeyed your wish," she replied, simply.

"Yes, and I thank you for it; and now, what is the new danger that threatens me?"

"You have still some little portion of your fortune left?"

"Yes, a few thousands that I have saved from the wreck," Montgomery answered.

"Your foes strike at that next."

"Indeed, how?"

"That I can not tell you."

"Why not?"

"Because I do not know; the White Witch, you see, frankly confesses her ignorance. All that I know is that the League of Three intend to strike another blow at you. What have you left that they can strike at, except the little remnant of your fortune?" she asked.

"You have just now confessed that your wisdom does not extend to knowing every thing," Montgomery said, quietly.

The veiled woman looked at him in wonder.

"I do not understand you," she said. "Again the White Witch is ignorant."

"You say that my fortune is all that I have left; you are wrong. I have something that I value more than I do the money."

"I guess what that is," said the White Witch, dryly.

"You do?"

"Yes; you mean that you are loved."

"Right; I am."

"A fatal love that will lead you to your ruin," the veiled woman said, gravely.

"No, you are wrong; it is a love that will make my future life happy beyond expression."

"You will not be warned?"

"Against her?"

"Yes."

"Do you know the name of the lady that I refer to?"

"I can guess it."

"Well, then, speak it. If you can guess her name you are indeed a witch, for the secret of our love is known only to the lady and myself," said Montgomery, confidently.

"Leone!"

Montgomery uttered an exclamation of surprise. With wonder in his face, he gazed upon the mysterious woman.

"I can not understand this!" he cried.

"Oh, Angus Montgomery, you are walking blindly into the snare! Your love for Leone is a broken reed; lean upon it and it will snap in twain," she said, bitterly.

"I confess your knowledge surprises me," he said, slowly, and in wonder.

"The knowledge of your love known only to yourself and the lady?" said the woman, scornfully. "You are wrong. Lionel O'Connell knows that you love her and that she loves you."

"He does?" exclaimed Montgomery, stupefied at the news.

"Yes; and she told him."

"Ah!" A sudden light flashed upon Montgomery's brain.

"From O'Connell, then, you procured your information?"

"Perhaps," replied the White Witch, ambiguously.

"Perhaps! I am sure of it!" cried Montgomery. "Well, there is no harm in her speaking of it. I am not ashamed of my love. This O'Connell is an old friend of hers; the only one, besides myself, that she has in this strange country. What is more natural than that she should confide her happiness to him?"

"Lionel O'Connell her friend?" and there was a peculiar expression in the tone of the veiled woman that grated harshly on Montgomery's ear.

"Yes, her friend," he replied.

"Is he not more than a friend? Question her and see if she will answer you!"

The words of the mysterious woman cut like a knife-thrust to Montgomery's heart.

"How! would you dare to—" and then he checked his impulsive speech.

"Well?" The White Witch looked at him, calmly.

"Pardon me, I was hasty," he said. "Answer one question. Does not Leone love me?"

"Yes, better than she loves any thing in this world, and

yet her love will bring you to your ruin. 'Tis to tell you this that I have seen you to-night. And now, farewell. If you are a gentleman, you will not follow me."

A moment and the woman was gone

CHAPTER XXIX.

A SLIGHT MISTAKE.

MONTGOMERY gazed after the woman in astonishment.

A turn in the path, and the trees hid her from his sight.

Angus was strangely perplexed.

"This affair grows more and more mysterious!" he exclaimed, in wonder. "Who is this woman? I am sure that I know her. Her voice is familiar to me in spite of her efforts to disguise it. Whence comes this strange knowledge that she possesses of my affairs? By Jove! the whole thing seems more like a troubled dream than living truth. She warns me against Leone's love, yet she does not deny that she does love me. This is a riddle that I can not solve. Leone's love will bring me to ruin! Such was her warning. I have it!" he exclaimed, suddenly, as a thought flashed across his mind. "I will see Leone to-morrow. I will question her. She will tell the truth, I am sure."

Then a slight noise behind the bushes to the left of the path attracted Montgomery's attention.

"Hello! there's some one there," he murmured. "Can it be a spy upon our conversation? Perhaps so. By Jove! I'll see who it is."

Acting at once upon the resolve, Montgomery cautiously approached the bushes from whence the noise had come.

All now was still.

As Montgomery advanced, he caught sight of a skulking figure some fifty paces from the clump of bushes. The back of the man was toward him, and he was stealing along cautiously, apparently dogging the White Witch.

"'Tis as I thought," muttered Montgomery, as his eyes fell upon the figure of the man who had evidently been concealed behind the bushes. "This man has played the spy and overheard our conversation. He is now following this mysterious woman. In turn, I'll follow him. He is here for no good. I'll learn his errand, and who sent him on it, or I'll strangle him. I'll get on ahead and surprise him as he goes through the archway."

Montgomery proceeded at once to carry out his resolution.

Bending round in a wide circle he gained the side of the archway facing southward.

The little path swept down into a hollow, and a road carried over it in the hollow, formed the archway.

The mouth of the archway was quite dark.

When Montgomery reached his post, the dark form of the White Witch had just disappeared around the angle of the path leading to the gate.

"This fellow has little idea that he is waited for," Montgomery muttered, as he nerved himself to spring upon the man who was following the woman so cautiously.

Montgomery was in a fever of nervous excitement. There is a subtle charm in a man-hunt to all whose blood courses freely in their veins.

Listening intently, Montgomery heard the stealthy steps of the spy stealing through the darkness of the archway.

Nearer and nearer came the steps.

Montgomery nerved himself for the coming struggle. Each muscle in his frame seemed turned into steel. Naturally vigorous, and possessing more than common strength, he had little fear of the approaching contest. Besides, he had on his side the advantage of the surprise. And he had noted, too, even with the slight glimpse that he had caught of the spy, that he was not a very formidable antagonist, or at least, Montgomery judged so from his appearance.

The hollow sound of the man's footsteps grew louder and louder.

The spy was near at hand.

A dark figure came from the gloom of the vaulted way.

With the spring of the panther, leaping upon its prey, Montgomery sprung upon the spy.

Taken by surprise, the unknown was hurled to the earth, while over him bent Montgomery, his strong hands grasping him by the throat.

A moment only did Montgomery enjoy his advantage, the product of surprise; for, with a snake-like motion, the unknown wriggled himself out of Montgomery's grip, and with a sudden twist, rolled the young man from his breast. Desperately Montgomery grappled with his antagonist. The young man was far superior to the other in strength, but not in the wiles of the wrestler's art.

Another snake-like movement, another twist, and Montgomery sprawled over on the earth, while his unknown foe, profiting by his advantage, placed his knee on the young man's breast, and catching him by the collar, twisted his knuckles in his throat in a very dextrous manner, that threatened to strangle Montgomery, off-hand.

"Well, now you've got it, ain't you?" gasped the unknown, whose heavy breathing gave visible proof of how desperate the struggle had been and what exertions he had made.

When Montgomery heard the voice of the unknown he would have uttered an exclamation of surprise had not the iron knuckles of the other, pressing, lever-like, in his throat, forbade the utterance.

The unknown noticed the start of surprise that Montgomery

made, and thought it an indication that he was about to renew the struggle. He did not fully realize how complete his victory was.

"Don't try that on!" exclaimed the unknown, sternly. "You're bigger than I am but I've got a little weapon here that makes us even; perhaps it gives me a little advantage."

And as the stranger spoke he drew a revolver from his pocket and leveled it at the head of the young man.

Again Montgomery tried to speak, and the unknown, now guessing his intention, removed his knuckles from his throat.

"Pipgan!" exclaimed the young man.

Pipgan—for the spy was no other than the Englishman—uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"Hollo! Who's this that knows me?"

Then he looked sharply into Montgomery's face.

"Mr. Montgomery!" the Englishman cried, in astonishment.

Removing his knee from the young man's breast, he assisted him to rise.

"Well, jigger my buttons!" Pipgan said, in utter amazement. "I never should have dreamed it was you."

"I saw you following the woman, and thinking that you were a spy, hired by some one to watch us, I determined to find out who and what you were," Montgomery said, recovering his breath.

"And that was the reason that you pounced onto me, eh?" said Pipgan, replacing his revolver in his pocket as he spoke.

"Yes."

"Well, I couldn't imagine who it was, so I fought all I knew how."

"I never should have guessed that you possessed such strength," said Montgomery, looking at the apparently slender form of the Englishman in astonishment.

"'Tain't the strength, sir," replied Pipgan. "I'm a wrestler, and you ain't. That's where I had the advantage. But it was the toughest job that I've had for many a day."

"You overheard the interview between this mysterious woman and myself?"

"Every word."

"What do you think of it?" asked Montgomery, anxiously.

"I'll tell you better, when I find out who she is," replied Pipgan, ambiguously.

"You are going to follow her, then?"

"Yes."

"But she requested me not to follow her."

"Yes; I heard her, but I am not you."

"No, but you are acting for me."

"The idea is just here, Mr. Montgomery. I think that this woman speaks the truth about the League of Three. If I can find out who she is, perhaps I can find out also where she gets her information about you. You've got powerful enemies, and all means are fair to beat 'em," said the Englishman impatiently.

"Your words can not be disputed," Montgomery said, thoughtfully.

"But if you say give up the chase, give it up it is. 'Obey orders, though you break owners,' was always my motto."

"You think, then, that you can hunt this woman down?"

"If I don't, you can take my head and bile it as a cabbage!" cried Pipgan, emphatically. "But, come, decide, quick; the woman will get out of the way; we are losing valuable time."

"Go; use your own judgment," cried Montgomery, hastily.

"That's the ticket!" Pipgan responded, in joy. The Englishman had the instincts of the blood-hound in his nature.

"Where can I find you to-morrow at twelve?"

"At the Fifth Avenue Hotel."

"All correct."

And Pipgan again followed on the trail.

But, as he had said, precious minutes had been lost.

The Englishman hurried on without caution now, but when he arrived at the Park gate, the woman was not to be seen.

Eagerly Pipgan looked up and down Fifty-ninth street, but nowhere could he distinguish the dark form of the mysterious woman whom he was in search of.

"Just as I expected!" he muttered in disgust. "She's given me the slip and it's all his fault. Why on earth couldn't he have guessed that it was me that was tracking the woman? Blow the luck!"

Pipgan's rage attracted the attention of the Park policeman who was in the little sentry-house by the gate.

"P'hat the divil's the matter wid yees?" said the policeman, in a rich brogue that betrayed the Connaught man in every word, as he emerged from his shelter and approached the enraged Englishman.

"Oh!" and a brilliant idea occurred to Pipgan. "I say, my friend, did you notice a woman in dark clothes come through the gate a moment ago?"

"Is it a woman, now?" said the policeman, reflectively.

"Yes, a woman."

"An' she had dark clothes?"

"Yes."

"P'hat the divil should I tell yees for if I did see her?" demanded the policeman, arrogantly.

Pipgan saw that deception was necessary.

"The fact is, I think that she is a friend of mine that I used to know. I passed her a little while ago in the Park, but she had her face all muffled up in a veil so that I'm not sure. I wouldn't mind standing a trifle if you can tell me which way she went."

"You would?"

"Yes."

"How much?"

"But did you see which way she went?"

"Faith an' I did," said the policeman with a wink.

"I'll give a dollar to know," and Pipgan drew a bill from his wallet.

"A dollar is it?"

"Yes."

The policeman pocketed it, quickly.

"Do yees see that car a-goin' down the avenue?" and as he spoke he pointed down Seventh Avenue.

"The one with the red light?"

"Yis."

"She took that car?"

"She did that same, bedad!"

"Thank you!" said Pipgan, hastily, and he started off on a run down the avenue in chase of the car.

The policeman watched him with a grin.

"It's good legs he has of his own; it's well he's runnin'; divil a woman have I noticed to-night, at all, at all;" and with a broad grin on his face the guardian of the Park returned to his sentry-house.

Pipgan ran after the car at the top of his speed. He had no suspicion that the policeman had deceived him.

But luck was on the side of the Englishman, for the veiled woman had actually got into the very car that the policeman had pointed out.

The horses attached to the car were proceeding at a sharp trot, so that Pipgan was compelled to use all his strength to overtake the object of his pursuit.

Pipgan came up with the car when it halted at the stables to change horses.

A single glance and he saw that the veiled woman was in the car.

Congratulating himself on his success, the Englishman got on the rear platform.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE PURSUIT.

THE car started and the Englishman employed himself in examining the veiled woman.

Completely concealed as she was by the waterproof-cloak that she wore, Pipgan gained but little knowledge by his examination.

She was young; he was convinced of that. There was a certain graceful outline to the slender form that even the dark cloak could not conceal.

The thick veil masked her face from observation.

The Englishman watched her as a cat watches a mouse. Not a motion of the disguised unknown could escape his searching eyes.

After a while the conductor passed through the car collecting the fares.

When the veiled woman opened her pocket-book, and gave the conductor the coin, the keen eyes of Pipgan noticed the little white hand. It was a peculiar hand, long and slender, and white as the driven snow, and on one of the slender fingers shone a ring.

Pipgan thanked his lucky stars. Here was a clue at last.

In his eagerness the Englishman had pressed his gaze close to the car window. The masker happened to look in his direction. She saw the face pressed against the glass, the keen eyes fixed upon her, and she gave a slight start.

Pipgan noticed the movement, saw that he was detected and mentally cursed his own stupidity. He did not allow the woman, however, to see that he knew she had discovered that she was watched.

Carelessly, he turned his attention to another passenger, who sat on the other side of the car; then, after a while, he took his face from the window, and retired to the rear of the platform. There, he leaned against the iron rail and speculated upon the chances.

"She saw me, that's plain enough," he muttered; "but, does she suspect that I'm watching her? that's the question."

And as he put the query he noticed that the woman was looking toward the end of the car as if in search of him.

"She's suspicious," he murmured, as he saw this movement. "She's looking after me, that's evident enough. She can't elude me, but I don't want her to suspect that she is watched. If she discovers that she is, it may block my little game. I don't see how it can, very well, but still it may; there's no telling."

Then Pipgan—metaphorically—put on his thinking cap.

"I've got the idea! I've tumbled to it!" he cried, suddenly, scratching his nose thoughtfully, as he spoke. "The next time the car stops, I'll just change my base of operations and get on the front platform. She won't be apt to think of looking for me there."

Mentally, Pipgan shook hands with himself at the brilliant idea, which he proceeded to put into operation the next time the car stopped to take on a passenger.

Gaining the front platform, Pipgan again kept a watchful eye upon his game.

The woman moved uneasily in her seat. She had evidently noticed the absence of the man who had attracted her attention, and, instead of quieting her fears, his sudden disappearance had augmented them.

Pipgan saw all this and mused upon the cause.

"She ain't a bit easy," he murmured. "Why should a

stranger just squinting at her, worry her so?" It was a difficult question to answer, and though the Englishman in his time had solved many a riddle, this one puzzled him. "My disappearance ought to quiet her; but, she is evidently alarmed."

The car was crossing Sixth avenue when the veiled woman made a motion to the conductor to stop.

The watchful eye of Pipgan saw the movement.

"Another move in the game, eh?" he muttered.

The car stopped and the woman alighted. Pipgan remained on the car, but kept his eyes on the person. She proceeded to the sidewalk, turned into the side-street, and disappeared.

This was the moment for the Englishman to act. He jumped from the car and hurried up Broadway. When he reached the corner of the street down which the woman had turned, she was not to be seen!

Pipgan cogitated for a moment. He knew that it was clearly impossible for her to have walked the block that intervened between Broadway and the next avenue in the little time that had elapsed. Therefore, it was plain she must have entered one of the houses in the block.

"Well, now, I didn't expect that my bird was going to take shelter here," he muttered. Then he shook his head, sagely. "It won't do!" and he chuckled as he spoke; "it's a very clever trick, but I ain't to be thrown off the scent so easy. She's concealed in the street somewhere, in some dark doorway. She's got an idea that she is followed, and she wants to be certain of it. If I stay here, she may get out the other way. She could glide along in the shadow of the houses without my seeing her, maybe."

Then, after thinking for a moment, the Englishman made up his mind.

"I'll walk through the street; then I can discover if she is concealed in any of the doorways. It's dark; I don't think that she would be apt to recognize me."

But as the Englishman came to this conclusion, he detected a female form approaching on the other side of the street.

Pipgan was standing in a deep shadow cast by a projecting doorway.

"Jigger my buttons!" he cried, in delight; "it's my bird. She crossed over to the other side, doubled on her track, and has come back. Oh, you're smart, but you haven't thrown me off the scent, my little dear!"

Pipgan crouched close to the wall.

The woman came swiftly along. From the searching glances that she cast around it was evident that she was on the alert.

Thanks to the darkness, Pipgan escaped observation.

The veiled woman crossed Broadway, proceeded down the street to Sixth avenue, and took a car there.

Pipgan at a safe distance in the rear, followed. He saw the woman get on board the car, and when the car started, Pipgan was on the front platform, chuckling quietly at his success.

"No more rear platforms for me," he muttered; "my lady-bird don't get her eyes on me again this night, if I know myself, and I think I do."

The spy kept his eyes upon the veiled woman. He did not intend that she should escape him.

She made no attempt to leave the car, but rode all the way down to the Astor House.

There she got out, and waited on the corner. Crossing over to the opposite side of the street, Pipgan once again availed himself of the shadows of the walls.

The woman did not remain long on the corner, for a Twenty-third street stage coming up, she hailed it, and got inside.

Pipgan felt annoyed.

"Oh, Jerusalem crickets!" he muttered, in despair; "there isn't any chance of getting on the front of that concern. Shank's mare will have to do here. And if she takes a fancy to go clear to Twenty-third street, it will be a lively old run for me. But I'll stick to her, if she rides all over New York from now to doomsday." And, from the earnest look upon Pipgan's face, it was evident that he meant to keep his word.

Up Broadway went the omnibus in which the still-pursued woman was seated.

Up Broadway went the little Englishman, a sleuth-hound on the trail.

Luckily for Pipgan, the omnibus made quite a number of halts to take up and let down passengers.

The Englishman had a vague idea of trying to get upon the box of the stage, but concluded not to risk the chance of being scented by the game whom he was following so closely.

The Englishman kept just within sight of the stage. He did not dare to venture nearer for fear of being discovered.

As he followed in the chase, he congratulated himself that he had succeeded in evading the notice of the woman.

Never was there an idea with less foundation.

The veiled woman had detected that she was followed. Her keen eyes, constantly on the watch, had seen the Englishman following the stage, and had recognized him.

"It is the same man," the veiled woman muttered, in alarm, as her eyes fell upon the form of Pipgan. He was just passing in front of a brightly-lighted store, and his figure was plainly revealed.

"How can I escape him?" she muttered. "He will surely track me home unless I can contrive to elude him. Why does he follow me? What can be his motive?"

Then a sudden idea flashed upon her mind.

"That wil. do," she murmured; "but have I money enough?" Then she examined her pocketbook. And by the quick flash of her black eyes, that even the thick veil could not hide, one would have guessed that she had hit upon a plan to escape from the pursuit of her persistent follower.

"Blessed if this isn't awful!" muttered Pipgan, in disgust, as he followed at a sharp pace. "I'll go in training for the running championship if I have much of this thing to do."

On went the stage, and steadily the Englishman followed it.

Street after street was passed, yet the veiled lady descended not from the stage.

"This is too much of a good thing," muttered Pipgan, breathing heavily and laboriously. "I likes exercise, but not in such large doses as this 'ere. Blessed if my wind ain't 'bout all gone."

At Union Park the stage halted, and the eyes of the spy were gladdened by the sight of the veiled woman getting out.

"No more shank's mare!" cried Pipgan, in relief. "But what's the programme now?"

Pipgan's question was soon answered.

The omnibus rolled on, and the veiled woman entered the gates of the Park, and was soon lost to sight amid the gloom of the trees.

"I must follow her closely here, or else the jig is up," cried Pipgan, classically. Acting on the idea, he hurried across the intervening square and entered the Park. Scarcely a moment had elapsed between the disappearance of the veiled woman and the entrance of Pipgan into the Park, yet the dark figure that the Englishman had tracked so closely was not to be seen!

A low whistle escaped from the spy's lips; it was his way of expressing great astonishment.

"Well—she's done it now!" he cried, in rage; "given me the slip, by jinks!"

The Englishman guessed how he had been outwitted. The woman had detected that she was watched, had entered the Park, and, once inside the gates, had taken to her heels, and, in the darkness of the Park, a few moments had placed her beyond the possibility of pursuit.

"She's got me!" cried Pipgan, in smothered indignation; "she's as smart a bird as ever came under my notice. Here are three paths; which one did she take?"

Who could answer the question?

"I'll try the right-hand one first!" Pipgan cried. Then at the top of his speed he ran up the right-hand path.

The path was the one that led around the edge of the Park close to the fence.

Pipgan came to a gate—he darted through it and looked anxiously around, but no female figure met his eyes. Then he returned to the Park again. Each gate that he came to—there were three, he was making the circuit of the Park—he looked to see if he could discover the veiled woman crossing the square beyond.

At the last gate—the one on the left nearest to the gate by which he had entered the Park—he saw the game again. She was about to enter a carriage that stood there. Her foot was on the step.

Pipgan formed a desperate resolve. He saw that, once in the carriage, she would escape him, as he was without money to pay another to follow in pursuit.

"If I can see her face, I'll know her again!" he murmured. "I'll do it!"

With a sudden spring he stood by the side of the disguised woman.

A single motion and the Englishman tore the veil from her face.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE CLUE.

HARDLY had Pipgan's hand touched the veil that concealed the features of the mysterious woman, ere he felt a strong arm around his throat and he was dragged backward to the ground.

The woman darted into the carriage; the driver on the box whipped up his horse, and the carriage rolled off at a furious rate of speed. Pipgan did not succeed in seeing the face of the mysterious woman whom he had tracked so long and patiently.

The Englishman, attacked from the rear and taken by surprise, was carried to the pavement almost without resistance.

A moment only did the unknown, who had made the attack so suddenly, enjoy his triumph, for with one of the sudden wrestler twists with which but an hour or so before he had set at naught Montgomery's superior strength, Pipgan freed himself from the grip of his assailant, and catching the stranger by the legs, tossed him over in a heap upon the ground.

Then Pipgan sprung to his feet, but, as the struggle had taken up some little time, the carriage had disappeared in the distance.

With a cry of rage, the Englishman realized that his prey had escaped him.

A little knot of the drivers surrounded Pipgan and his antagonist, who was slowly picking himself up, considerably astonished at his sudden downfall.

Quite a number of carriages stood by the curbstone.

"Look-a here! what did you throw me over for, say!" demanded the fellow that Pipgan had upset so easily, in rising wrath.

"What did you pull me over for?" cried Pipgan, his blood up, and nettled at the escape of the woman.

"'Cos I wanted to," said the fellow, roughly. "Now you jest 'poligize or I'll hurt you, some!" and the man approached the Englishman, menacingly.

"Did that woman pay you to hold me, you cursed fool you?" cried Pipgan, in anger.

"Wot's that to you! Who do you call a fool, say, you mush-head?" retorted the man.

"Let's have a ring! fight it out!" cried one of the bystanders, in delight at the prospect of a row.

"Give me fair play and I can whip a dozen like this fool, who poked his nose into other people's business!" exclaimed Pipgan, who now had a great desire to thrash the meddler.

"Why, I kin eat you up!" said the man, sarcastically, and indeed he looked big enough to.

"Try it!" cried Pipgan, quickly, and as he spoke he put up his hands in a manner, one of the bystanders afterward said was, "werry scientific."

The big assailant and the little Englishman faced each other; the stranger swinging his long arms around like a windmill, the Englishman advancing and retreating on his toes like a dancing-master.

The man made a rush at his nimble antagonist, striking right and left with tremendous force, but, the strength of his blows were wasted on the air. Pipgan, quick as an eel, dodged the sledge-hammer blows, slipped under the arm of the other, and before he could turn, put in first the "right" and then the "left" on the brawny throat of the giant, and the result of which was, the man went into the gutter, all of a heap.

The Englishman had won, for the man quietly said that he was "satisfied."

"Lay low; here's a perliceman!" cried one of the lookers-on, cautiously.

The hint was enough, and the "meeting" dissolved.

The Englishman, walking up Broadway, cursed his ill-luck.

"Now, if this ain't awful!" he ejaculated in disgust. "I thought I had a dead sure thing, and this precious cove, that I've just polished off, had to come in and spoil it. It's been an awful run of luck to-day."

Mentally, Pipgan asked himself how he could recover the lost scent. Vainly he thought. He could not hit upon any device.

"If I ever see her again, I'll know her, I'm sure of that," he muttered. "I'll never forget those hands or the little ring. I'm going to find her; I'm sure of it, but I can't tell how, though."

Pipgan proceeded up Broadway at a rapid pace. His steps were keeping time with the busy thoughts passing so quickly across his brain.

"How odd this whole affair is!" he exclaimed, communing with himself as he hurried onward. "I hadn't any idea that this Countess of Epernay, as she calls herself, knew Mr. Montgomery. There's an awful deep game in it, somewhere. I must keep my eyes upon her. But, how the devil is it that this veiled woman, who calls herself the White Witch, knows anything about it, and why does she warn Mr. Montgomery? Oh! what a lot of riddles there are here!" and Pipgan looked around him in despair as if he expected to find a solution of the mystery in the silent houses, or the motionless stones of the street.

"How she knows, I can't guess; that's a thing or two beyond my wits, and they ain't generally considered dull ones, either. Now, why does she tell Montgomery? Oh!" and a possible solution of the mystery occurred to the Englishman.

"She loves him! that's as plain as the nose on my face! She loves him and she wants to save him from his enemies. I've got the tail of the rat now!" and Pipgan rubbed his hands together, gleefully. "I think I can see my way out of the hobble. All I've got to do is to find the girl that loves Mr. Montgomery, and at the same time that I discover her, I discover the White Witch. She has escaped me to-night, but she shan't escape me to-morrow."

And then another thought came into Pipgan's mind. A thought that made him knit his brows in wonder.

"The White Witch warns Montgomery not to love this Leone, and yet, in the same breath, tells him that this girl loves him. Now that's mysterious. She asked him, too, if he knew the relations that exist between Lionel O'Connell—pretty name, pity 'tain't his own"—and Pipgan laughed quietly—"and this girl, Leone. I rayther think I could give the young man all the information on that point that he wants; but, I'm afraid it would worry him some. Talk about tangled up affairs; if this one don't beat any thing that I ever heard of."

Then Pipgan walked on for a few paces in silence.

"I wonder if I could see Mr. Montgomery to-night?" he said, suddenly, and then, as if the wish had been a potent spell, he saw Montgomery coming down the street.

"Did you succeed?" asked Montgomery, eagerly, as they met.

"No," replied Pipgan.

"It was my fault then; I detained you; but for that unlucky mistake you might have succeeded. I don't know where my wits were. I never thought, even for a single instant, that it was you who had played the spy upon the interview between this mysterious woman and myself; yet, just

before the woman came, I was wondering where you were," said Montgomery, in despair.

"Oh, no!" cried the Englishman, quickly, "it wasn't your fault. I found out from the policeman at the gate which way she had gone. She got on a Broadway car; I followed her; then she took a Sixth avenue car to the Astor House; there she took an omnibus up Broadway; got out at Union Park, and there gave me the slip by getting into a carriage and driving off."

"Could you not follow her?"

"No; she had a little game fixed to stop me. I suppose she discovered that it wasn't much use to change from the cars to the bus, because I could do that, too—you see, sir, I was unlucky enough to let myself be caught watching her. So, she arranged a nice little plan to throw me off the track. Just as she was getting into the carriage, I rushed forward and snatched the veil from her face; it was the only thing I could do, you know, because I knew the dodge game was up, for I hadn't money enough to charter another vehicle to keep up the chase; and I was too tired to think of running after her."

"You took the veil from her face?" asked Montgomery, eagerly.

"Yes."

"Then you saw her features?"

"No; she darted into the carriage, and a beast of a driver, that probably had had a tip from her to stop me, caught me by the throat and tumbled me over like a sack of wheat. By the time I got on my feet, the carriage had got out of sight."

"She probably paid the fellow to stop you," said Montgomery, thoughtfully.

"Exactly, and I paid him with a couple of hot un's under the ear," said the Englishman, in a tone of extreme satisfaction.

"What! you fought with him?"

"Bless you, it wasn't a fight!" exclaimed Pipgan, contemptuously; "he was a big fellow, but no match for me. Why, I've put on the gloves with Jem Mace himself across the water, you know."

"Then you have not been able to gain any information as to who or what this mysterious person is?" Montgomery said.

"Oh, yes, I have!" replied the Englishman, quickly. "I lay two to one that I find out who she is before a week is over."

"You have a clue?"

"Yes; I saw her hand, and a ring on her finger."

"And can such a trifling discovery as that aid you?" Montgomery asked, in wonder.

"Trifling? Why, I've known a little discovery like that to hang a man," replied Pipgan, quickly.

"Within a week you say?"

"Yes; but, governor, I want some money," the Englishman said. "I've got to put on my swell togs again to-morrow."

Pipgan was dressed in a rough, dark suit.

"Very well; how much?"

"Oh, a few hundred. I say, governor, I heard all that vailed woman said about the League of Three—"

"And do you believe that it exists?" asked Montgomery, quickly.

"Well, I don't know," replied the Englishman, thoughtfully. "Queer things happen in this world. But, what I was going to say was, do you want me to find out the truth about the League if I can?"

"Yes; do so, by all means," exclaimed Montgomery.

"All correct. I've an idea that, in following on the track of the White Witch, I shall only stumble on the League. By the way, governor, I want to ask you a question. Don't be offended, because it's business. Is there a girl that thinks a great deal of you—that loves you?"

"Yes; you heard what the vailed woman said."

"About Miss Leone?"

"Yes."

"But, is there another girl?"

"Well—" Montgomery hesitated, "I am not sure that there any one else cares aught for me—"

"But you have a suspicion?"

"Yes."

"What's her name?"

"Agatha Chauncy."

"And her residence?"

Montgomery gave it, and Pipgan noted it down in his memorandum-book.

"Why do you wish to know this?"

"It's only a suspicion, governor, that's all. Will the money be ready to-morrow?" Pipgan asked.

"Yes."

And so the interview ended.

CHAPTER XXXII.

O'CONNEL'S GAME.

LIONEL O'CONNEL was seated in the luxuriantly furnished parlor of the Chauncy mansion.

It was early in the afternoon, and the warm sun was streaming in freely through the windows.

O'Connell glanced around him with an air of intense satisfaction.

"This isn't bad," he murmured, pulling the ends of his long mustache, reflectively, as he spoke. "Every thing is rich and costly. I wonder if it is my fate to come into all this? I suppose it will go to Frances; but, stay, there's the other sister, Agatha. Now, I wonder which of the two owns the property. If I remember rightly, I heard Roche say that the estate of the father was not to be divided until Agatha was twenty-one. She's the younger child, I suppose. Ah! Frances is a catch—a beautiful girl and plenty of money. All for Tulip Roche, eh?" and O'Connell laughed, quietly to himself, as he spoke.

"Oh, no!" he murmured, with decided emphasis; "my dainty little Tulip has money enough already. Let him look elsewhere; Frances is not for him."

Then a thought occurred to O'Connell, and he laughed outright at it.

"How cleverly I have used these two men to pull my chestnuts out of the fire, like the cat in the fable. A League of Three; ah! and to me, the chief of the League, all the benefit! It is the way of the world; to one, all; to the rest, nothing. How cleverly I put the ten-thousand-dollar bond into my pocket on the night when Tulip and I astonished Montgomery, and no one the wiser for it. So far my schemes have all succeeded. Now I must deal Roche a blow. I've crushed Montgomery from my path; he was a giant. Roche is a pigmy compared to Angus Montgomery, so I'll brush him away. A few words in the ear of my proud Frances, and Tulip Roche will never set foot within these doors again. I am the master, and these men are my tools, which, after use, I cast away. Power! there is no power in this world like that that comes from brains and nerve."

Then O'Connell's meditations were cut short by the rustle of a silk dress.

A smile lighted up O'Connell's face as he listened to the sound.

"She is coming," he murmured; "a few more minutes will decide."

Frances entered the room.

Dressed in a robe of azure silk, she looked prettier than ever.

O'Connell rose and bowed gallantly as she approached.

"I am glad you have called," she said, a smile on her face as she gave him her hand.

Then she sat on the sofa by his side.

O'Connell had always been a great favorite with Frances. His brilliant, dashy way; the delicate homage that he paid to her beauty and accomplishments—all had their influence upon the mind of the blonde beauty.

"Now you can hardly guess how delighted I am to hear you say that!" he exclaimed, in his lively way.

"Indeed?" replied Frances. "Well, then, to please you, I'll say it every time that you call."

"What! whether it be the truth or not?"

"But it will always be the truth," Frances retorted, with one of her brightest smiles.

"Ah, you must not speak in that way or I shall enter the list, with Mr. Roche, and he'll find me a desperate rival!" exclaimed O'Connell, watching the face of the girl keenly as he spoke.

"I don't understand what you can possibly mean," said Frances, with a look of apparent astonishment, and a slight blush swept rapidly across her face.

"Why, I thought that—that is, I mean that I heard that Mr. Roche was going to follow Mr. Montgomery's example."

Frances bit her lips at the mention of Montgomery's name.

"Follow his example!" she said, as if in doubt. "What do you mean? lose all his money—I believe that Mr. Montgomery has lost all his money, hasn't he?"

"Nearly all, I believe," O'Connell replied; "but I did not mean that. Instead of losing he is going to gain; gain what poets call a treasure."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, a great treasure."

"Why don't you explain? You are a horrid tease, Mr. O'Connell," said Frances, pouting in assumed anger.

"Oh, am I? Well, I never was accused of that before, but I'll relieve your anxiety. The treasure is a wife."

"Mr. Montgomery you mean?"

"Both Mr. Montgomery and Mr. Roche."

"I understood that Mr. Montgomery was engaged, but Mr. Roche—"

"And really were you not aware of his engagement?" asked O'Connell, in amazement.

"No."

"Really?" repeated O'Connell, as if unable to credit his hearing.

"Yes, really. Why should you think otherwise?" Frances asked, unable to guess the reason for the question.

"Well, that is certainly very strange!" said O'Connell, apparently greatly astonished.

"What is very strange?"

"Why, that you should not know that Mr. Roche was engaged."

"How could I know it?"

"You should know it, for you are the lady that report says he is to marry," said O'Connell, and as he spoke he watched the effect of his words with great interest.

"Mr. Roche engaged to me!" Frances was annoyed at the news. She had not seen Tulip since the day when he had visited her with Stoll. He had called thrice to see her, and each time she had been out.

"Yes."

"Does he say so?" asked Frances, an angry thought taking possession of her mind that, perhaps, Tulip had boasted that she would now come back to him, since Montgomery had broken faith with her. The thought was wormwood to the girl.

"I—I—" and O'Connel hesitated, in great confusion.

"Mr. O'Connel, I ask you as a friend, to tell me the truth. Has Tulip Roche reported that I was engaged to be married to him?" asked Frances, a bright red spot burning in her wax-like cheeks.

"My dear Miss Frances, consider the position that you place me in," said O'Connel, earnestly. "Consider if I answer the question, I may betray—I say *may*, mind, I do not say that I will—but I may betray the man that I am proud to call my friend."

Frances looked at O'Connel's face for a moment in silence.

"You need not answer the question, Mr. O'Connel," she said, at length. "I will not ask you to betray the confidence reposed in you. I am glad that there is one man in the world that respects friendship. I read the truth in your face."

"I hope that you do not believe that—" O'Connel paused in the midst of the sentence.

"I will not ask you any questions. I am satisfied," Frances replied, meaningly. "I do not know what you have heard, but I trust that you will believe me when I say that I am both heart and hand free."

O'Connel bowed.

"It is a foolish matter, I suppose, to be annoyed about, but it does annoy me," Frances said, pettishly.

"Ah! I wish—" and then he paused in his speech.

"What do you wish?" she asked, softly.

"That I had the right to protect you from all such reports," he said, firmly.

Frances, with a grateful look, thanked him for his speech, and then, with a half-blush, cast down her eyes. She read something in his earnest gaze that she had never thought of before.

"Have I your permission to contradict this report?" he asked, softly.

"Yes," she replied, raising her eyes again to his. "I have not even seen Mr. Roche for some time. If I remember rightly, the last time I saw him he called here with Mr. Stoll; yes, I am sure that was the last time. I am sure, because they told me about Mr. Montgomery's engagement with some French lady, and you and Mr. Montgomery and the lady—I suppose it was the lady he was engaged to, for she looked like a foreigner—drove past the house that forenoon."

"Eh?" and O'Connel looked astonished. "Were you told on that day that Mr. Montgomery was engaged to the Countess of Epernay?—that is the name of the French lady?"

"Yes, of course," and Frances wondered at the question.

"There's some terrible mistake here. Who told you?"

"Mr. Stoll; and when I wondered at it, he appealed to Mr. Roche, and he confirmed it," said Frances, who began to have a dim suspicion that she was going to hear something unpleasant.

"I can't understand it at all!" exclaimed O'Connel, in wonder. "Why, my dear Miss Frances, when they told you that Montgomery was engaged to the lady, he hadn't been acquainted with the lady but a few hours. It was about eleven o'clock that day when I met Mr. Montgomery, Mr. Stoll, and Mr. Roche on Broadway. They had told Mr. Montgomery about the beautiful unknown, as they called her, and knowing that I was acquainted with the lady, Mr. Montgomery asked me to give him an introduction. I did so; then we went out in the carriage through the Park, and then home. Montgomery and I left the lady together. So, you see, at the time that they reported that he was engaged to her, he hadn't even been alone with the lady."

This disclosure came upon Frances like the shock of a thunderbolt.

She saw that she had been deceived, and she guessed at once that Tulip Roche had forged the story in order to separate her from Montgomery.

Frances' face first grew white and then red. Her rosy nails were buried in the snow-white palms. She bit her lips to keep back the angry words that rose from her heart.

O'Connel watched the young girl's face narrowly, yet apparently he saw nothing. He read her thoughts in the varying expression of her face.

He laughed to himself.

Tulip Roche now would never win Frances Chauncy.

He felt as if the game was in his hands already.

"I can not understand the reason for such a deception,"

O'Connel said, after a long pause.

"I can," replied Frances, raising her head slowly. "They accomplished their purpose. It was a noble act; only a gentleman"—and bitter was the tone in which she pronounced the word—"would have thought of such a device. But is not Mr. Montgomery engaged to this lady?"

"Yes, but it was only yesterday that the engagement was made."

"Yesterday?" Frances said, mechanically. Her thoughts were far away. Again she saw Montgomery stand before her in the gloomy parlor; again the scene of separation came back to her memory.

How bitterly now she regretted her words. But the deed was done. Montgomery and she were as strangers to each other. Her own lips had decreed it.

"By the way," said O'Connel, as if anxious to change the conversation, "I've had some good news lately from across the water."

"Indeed!" said Frances, with an effort rousing from her abstraction; "I'm glad of it."

"I felt sure that you would be," he said. "My elder brother, whose temper drove me from home, is dead, and all his property comes to me. My lawyers write that it will realize about ten thousand pounds; that's over fifty thousand dollars in our money here."

"You will still remain in New York?"

"Oh, yes!" he answered, quickly; "there is a tie that binds me to this city. There is something here—a jewel of great value—that I crave. When I was only a poor journalist, I did not dare to hope to win it, but now, perhaps, there is a chance for me."

Frances blushed at his earnest words and still more earnest eyes. She guessed that she was the jewel.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE SNARE.

LEONE was pacing restlessly up and down her apartment. A look of deep anxiety was on her handsome features.

"Three o'clock," she murmured, consulting her watch, "he will soon come then. Oh! it is agony to reflect that I am forced to betray that I love so well. But I can not help it. I am in the toils, and must do my master's will."

Then her quick ear heard the sound of Montgomery's footsteps in the entry approaching her door. She had learned to know her lover's footsteps from all others.

"It is he," she murmured.

Montgomery knocked lightly at the door.

"Come in," said Leone, her voice trembling with joy.

The young man entered the room.

He extended his hands toward the girl; eagerly, with a bright smile of joy upon her face, she gave herself up to her lover's caresses.

"Are you glad to see me?" he asked, smoothing back the dark hair from the white forehead and gazing fondly in the upturned face that nestled on his breast.

"Can you doubt it?" she replied.

"No!" he exclaimed, touching with his lips the low, sweet forehead.

"But, come, sit down," he said. "I've something to say to you, Leone."

A shade passed over the girl's face, and a strange expression shone in her dark eyes as the words fell upon her ears. It was but momentary, and Montgomery noticed it not.

Leone released herself from the embrace of her lover and pushed a large cushioned rocking-chair with huge arms toward him. Montgomery seated himself in it. Then Leone brought a small chair, and placing it by the side of the other, sat down in it, resting her arms upon her lover's, and with a smile, wherein anxiety was strangely blended with affection, waited for Montgomery to speak.

"Leone, in order that you shall fully understand what I wish to say to you, it is necessary to speak a little of my past life," he said, gazing earnestly into the face of the girl. "A month or so ago I was worth over a hundred thousand dollars, and was engaged to be married to a beautiful and wealthy girl, one of the reigning belles in New York. One night, at a masquerade in Newport, a woman dressed all in white, and who called herself the White Witch, predicted that within one month or one year, I would lose both my fortune and the lady that I loved. The month has expired. Nearly all the prediction has been fulfilled. The lady broke the vows that she had made, and by a series of disasters I have lost almost all my fortune. Now I am coming to the part that concerns you. When I left you yesterday, as I was passing down stairs, a letter was handed to me. It was from the mysterious woman who, at Newport, had called herself the White Witch. It contained a request that I should meet the writer at a certain place at nine in the evening, and also told me that more misfortunes threatened me."

"I kept the appointment and met the woman. She was carefully disguised. Now, Leone, judge of my astonishment when I found that she knew of our engagement. She warned me against your love—said that it was a fatal passion that would drag me to my ruin."

"And do you believe her words?" asked Leone, quietly, and looking full into Montgomery's face with her brilliant, dark eyes.

"Leone, have I said that I believed her?" replied Montgomery, reproachfully.

"No," Leone said, with a sad smile.

"Leone," and Montgomery passed his arm fondly around the little waist of the girl as he spoke, "is your love fated to bring me to ruin?"

"How can I tell? Can I read what is in the future? But, Angus, perhaps there is a way to avoid the evil?"

"How?"

"Give me up," and Leone hid her face on his breast as she spoke.

"Give you up!" cried Montgomery, quickly. "Oh, Leone, you can not guess the pain that those few words give me; and can you speak them calmly?"

The girl did not reply, but kept her face hid.

"Leone, you do not answer," he said.

"I can not," she murmured, faintly.

"Lift up your head and let me look at your face," he said, after a moment's pause.

"No, no," she murmured.

"Leone," he said, reproachfully.

The tone touched her. Slowly she raised her head until her eyes met those of Montgomery.

A single look into her face and the lover read the truth.

The tear-drops were glistening in the large, black eyes.

"The thought does give you pain?" he exclaimed.

"And yet, for your sake, I will bear it," she said, earnestly.

"You will give me up?"

"Yes."

"And do you think, even for a single instant, that I would permit you to do such a thing?" he cried, quickly. "Leone, I begin to believe that you do not fully realize how much I do love you."

"But, if that love is to prove your ruin—" she said, faintly, again sinking her head down upon his breast.

"Let it come! I care little for the future if I have your love to bless and cheer me. Let the road of fortune be rough or smooth, I care not, so long as I know that I am battling for you. Leone, you don't know what a great thing it is for a man to feel that there is one heart in this world that he can call his own. It gives one double courage in the great life-fight. Love is the most powerful motive that this world has ever known."

With closed eyes and a beating heart, the girl listened to the passionate words. They were as the waters of life to her crushed and bleeding heart. The future rose before her bright and beautiful. She saw herself the happy wife of the man on whose bosom her head rested. She felt the throbbing of that heart that beat for her alone.

"Angus," she said, raising her head slowly, until her eyes met his, "I have said that I loved you, and those words are cold and feeble to express the feeling that is in my heart. You are all in all to me—my world! Your love would make all my future life one blissful dream. Your love builds for me a great and glorious castle, but it is a castle in the air; no mortal foot can reach it. I must first walk through the dark valley of death; then, perhaps, I may enjoy the dream of happiness that now is only a dream."

"Leone, if my love can make you happy, then you will be happy. I have your promise, and no power on earth can prevent me from claiming you as my wife!" exclaimed Montgomery, firmly.

"But I am almost a stranger to you," the girl said, with downcast eyes.

"I have faith! This mysterious woman last night tried to shake my confidence in you. She bid me ask you concerning your relations with this Lionel O'Connel."

Leone could not repress a slight start.

"Why are you agitated?" asked Montgomery, noticing the impulsive movement of the girl.

"Angus, I can not tell you," said Leone, quickly.

"Then there is something in the words of the woman? There is a secret understanding between you and O'Connel?"

"Yes," Leone replied, slowly.

"And that secret?"

"I can't tell you now," Leone answered.

"Will there be a time when you can reveal this secret to me?"

"Yes," Leone answered, eagerly.

"That is all I ask; I am satisfied with that assurance," Montgomery said, calmly.

"You still love me?" Leone asked, earnestly.

"Love you! yes! as deeply as ever man loved woman!" Montgomery answered, impulsively.

"Even when I tell you that there is a secret connected with my life that I can not reveal to you?" Leone asked, with her dark eyes fixed eagerly on Montgomery's face.

"Leone, I love and trust you!" Montgomery exclaimed, and again he drew the head of the girl to his heart, and kissed the ripe, red lips, so fresh in their dewy sweetness.

"You do love me!" Leone said, softly.

"How well, you will one day learn," he replied.

Then to the mind of the girl came the sickening thought that she had a task to perform; the will of O'Connel to carry out. And even at the very moment when Montgomery's strong arms were pressing her to his heart, and his deep voice was whispering the sweet words that told of love and joy eternal, she must close her ears to the honeyed melody, and soil her mind with schemes of deception—nets of lies to entrap the noble heart on which her head was pillowed.

Oh! how she longed for freedom from the bonds that bound her to that iron master's will.

"Angus, there has been a sudden change in my fortune," she said, in hesitating accents.

"Yes; I know," he interrupted, gently caressing the silken locks that covered the shapely head.

"You know?" she asked, in astonishment.

"Yes; I met O'Connel as I entered the hotel. He told me all about the loss of your property. Leone, will you not let me be your banker?" he asked, softly.

"You?"

"Yes; I shall charge you a terrible interest—payable in kisses," and he laughed lightly as he spoke.

"Angus, you are too good to me," she murmured. Montgomery did not notice the bitterness in her tones.

"Good? Not at all!" he replied. "Luckily I've my check-book with me."

A table with pen and ink stood near Montgomery's chair. He drew it up to him and tore a check out of the book.

"You will soon be my wife, Leone; do not hesitate to accept a little of your property in advance. What sum shall I put on the check?"

"Why, I—" Leone hesitated, she hardly knew how to answer.

"I have it!" Montgomery exclaimed. "I'll leave it blank—just sign my name to it. You can fill it up with any sum you like. It is 'to order;' and that you shall have no trouble, I'll step down to the bank to-morrow morning and give instructions in regard to it. These paying-tellers are terrible careful fellows, and there might be some trouble about it."

Then Montgomery signed his name to the check and gave it to her.

She took it almost mechanically.

"That's good for thirty thousand dollars, pet; that's all that I have left in the world, but I don't suppose you will need quite so large a sum as that," and Montgomery laughed.

Leone hid her face in her hands. She could not speak; her heart was too full.

"Don't look sorrowful," said Montgomery, as, rising, he drew her slight figure fondly to his breast. "I must say good-by for the present. I have a business appointment at four o'clock. I will come again to-night."

"In the future I hope to be able to prove to you how much I love you," Leone murmured as she clung fondly to the breast of her lover.

"Good-by."

Again and again Montgomery pressed the soft, loving lips. It is so hard for lovers to part.

"I am not worthy of his love!" Leone cried, in despair, as the door closed behind her lover. "I have given him into the hands of his enemies; betrayed to ruin the man that loves me! Oh! I will not carry out this vile scheme! O'Connel shall not have this check; I'll destroy it at once!"

But a strong hand wrested the precious paper from her.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

AN UNWILLING INSTRUMENT.

LEONE turned in astonishment and beheld Lionel O'Connel.

"Oh, no, my dear!" he said, sneeringly, and putting his hand that held the note behind him, "this precious bit of paper is not to be destroyed."

Angry fires flashed from Leone's eyes.

"Lionel, give me back that paper!" she cried.

"Hello!" he said, in pretended amazement; "is that the tone to address me with? You are forgetting yourself, my dear Leone."

"I will be your slave no longer!" she cried. "I will not betray the man that loves me so well. I know that you mean to use that paper to work him evil. You shall not if I can prevent it."

"Leone, again I say that you are forgetting yourself," said O'Connel, coolly, and not at all affected by the girl's passionate outburst.

"No, but I have forgotten—forgotten all that was good, and stooped to all that was evil at your bidding. I will do so no longer!" All the fire in Leone's nature was roused; undaunted she faced the cool and smiling man who seemed only to laugh at her angry words.

"You do not remember a certain promise, then?" he said, meaningly.

"Yes, I do remember; but I am sure that she to whom I gave that promise will look down from her home above and absolve me from it, when she knows the dreadful deed that you wish to force me to commit!" replied the girl, spiritedly.

"You will not listen to reason, then?"

"No! give me back that paper!"

"And if I do not?" asked O'Connel.

"I will go to Angus Montgomery—"

"What?" and a fierce light blazed in O'Connel's eyes as he uttered the exclamation. "You will go to Montgomery?"

"Yes, and tell him of the snare that his love for me, and my weak compliance with your command has led him into."

Leone did not quail before O'Connel's frown, but faced him with a face as angry and a will as firm as his own.

"I have always taken you to be a sensible girl," he said, slowly.

"And now do you change your opinion because I will not betray the man that I love?"

"You prefer, then, to betray me?"

"Betray you?" she said, in wonder

"Yes, of course. You agreed to perform this service for me. In consideration of that service, I agreed to release you from the promise—which, mind, I did not ask you to make—which binds you to follow my fortunes, be they good or be they bad. Have I not stated the truth?"

"Yes."

"Well, then, you break your word with me, do you not? You betray me."

"Be it so; I do betray you," said Leone, firmly.

"You have decided?"

"Yes."

"Don't you think that you had better wait awhile, give the matter a little thought and not answer so hastily?" O'Connel said, coolly.

"It is useless. I shall not change my mind. I have decided, for the first time in my life. I know what the passion of love is. I have never felt it before; but now, it fills my heart, sways my nature, and creates a new life for me!"

"For the first time in your life you are doing something stupid," O'Connel said, with a sneer. "Why do you attempt to fight against me? The contest is useless. I have marked Montgomery out for ruin; hunted him down inch by inch as the bloodhound runs down its prey. And now that the quarry is at my feet, my hand raised to give the *coup de main*—the master-stroke—that crushes the man I hate helpless to the earth, you coolly tell me to forego my vengeance, and refuse the aid you promised me. Upon my word, Leone, either you are crazy or I am," and O'Connel laughed loudly.

There was a hidden menace in his merriment that grated harshly on Leone's senses.

"Taunt as you please, Lionel; you will find that I'll keep my word," she said, coldly.

"And you will find that I will keep mine!" he cried, quickly. "Do you take me for a man of wax and think to mold me as easily? No, Leone, you will do my will!"

"Lionel O'Connel, you are foolish to think so!" Leone responded, firmly.

"Oh, am I?" he said, with latent sarcasm. "Just listen to me for a moment and perhaps you may change your opinion. You told me some time ago that you intended to tell Montgomery of the past. I suppose that you meant that you would tell him of the dark tragedy that clouds some eventful hours of your life."

"Yes, tell him all," Leone answered.

"Tell him of your share in the transaction?"

"Yes."

"And do you think that he will marry you when he knows all?" there was a peculiar metallic ring in O'Connel's voice.

"If he loves me as well as I love him, he will," Leone answered.

"But there is a doubt. Look back at the past! Let me call to your memory a room in an old English manor house, lighted only by a single candle. A man and a woman sit in that room. Suddenly another man enters with a gun in his hand. Angry words fill the air; a shot follows that spills human blood. Two persons, alone, know who fired that shot, as the third one of the three was killed by the shot. Suppose I, overcome by the tortures of a guilty conscience—go before a police-magistrate, confess my share in the crime and give the name of the woman who did the deed!"

Leone strated in affright, while O'Connel gazed upon her with a look of triumph.

"You would not surely be so base?" she cried, in horror.

"Try me and you will find!" he replied, fiercely. "Leone, as well might the drowning man, sinking helpless in the waters of mid ocean, call upon the heaving billows to spare him, as for you to make me spare Angus Montgomery, now that I have him in my power! You perceive, I hold you in fetters. Do my will in this, and I will give this man up to you as I promised. You can tell him what story you please; I will not contradict it. Come, do you agree?"

"Oh, I am utterly in your power!" Leone cried, despairingly.

"Yes, that is the word, 'utterly'!" he said, with an accent of triumph.

"I must obey—you force me to do it," and Leone sunk into a chair, burying her face in her hands.

"Now you are sensible. I had an idea that some foolish whim might enter your head—I know what follies this 'love' makes us all commit—so, when I saw Montgomery enter the hotel, I followed him up-stairs. Luckily for my purpose, the room adjoining your bedroom was empty, and a door leads from it into your apartment. I knew this. I've a capital little key here," and O'Connel took a small skeleton key from his vest pocket. "It opened the door between; so, concealed in your bedroom, I overheard all that passed between you two. Why, Leone, you really astonished me. I had no idea that you had so much tenderness in your nature. Why have you hid it all these long years?" and O'Connel laughed his cynical laugh.

"Lionel, spare me your word," Leone said, faintly. "Is it not enough that I am helplessly in your power? Do not taunt me because I am weak enough to love the man, who, perhaps, when he knows my sad story, may turn from me in loathing."

"Beauty is like charity, Leone, and covers a multitude of sins. One look in your eyes, one touch of your lips, and Montgomery will take you to his heart, forgive and forget all. But now having come to an understanding, I say adieu for the present. I'll call in again this evening as I come up-town."

Then with a light step, O'Connel left the room.

The hot tears filled Leone's eyes.

Tears relieve the heart overwhelmed with sorrow.

Tears are nature's remedy for the hurt spirit.

The willow wand bends that it may not break.

O'Connel's face, as he descended the stairs, showed plainly the satisfaction that filled his heart.

"Who says that fortune is a fickle jade?" he murmured. "To me her smile has ever been fair and constant. How quickly I broke the girl to my will. She is a stubborn piece of womanhood. It is as well that we are to separate."

"How every thing seems to prosper with me. My will works like witchcraft. I think that I am sure of Frances Chauncy. I put Tulip Roche out of the question by my disclosure of his treachery. How nicely my chestnuts have been pulled out of the fire without my having to endanger my own dainty paws! Tulip Roche rids me of Montgomery; then Tulip, by his own act, rids me of himself. The field is clear, and I the favorite, booked to win in a canter." O'Connel laughed, merrily.

"Now, I must find this Montgomery. My conscience reproaches me for the part that I have taken in aiding Roche and Stoll in their infamous designs upon him. I'll make a clean breast of it, and then, Montgomery can fight Roche and Stoll. That's a glorious ideal!" and O'Connel laughed again. "If Montgomery and Roche hate each other as bitterly as they should, there is a strong probability that there will be a conflict between them. One, or perhaps both, may be removed from my way. Ah, there's Montgomery, now!"

O'Connel had caught sight of the young man standing in front of the hotel, apparently waiting for some one.

O'Connel tapped Montgomery on the shoulder.

"Montgomery, I was looking for you; I have something of great importance that I wish to say to you."

"Indeed! What is it?" asked Montgomery, a little astonished at the odd beginning, as well as at the earnest face of the other.

"Before I can speak, I must ask you to give me your promise that you will not reveal to any one from whom you received the information that I am about to impart."

"Certainly; I will give you the promise, willingly," Montgomery replied, although he could not divine why such a promise should be needed.

"Within a short time some heavy misfortunes have occurred to you, I believe."

Montgomery started. He looked at O'Connel, in wonder.

"Yes, you are correct. I have been very unlucky."

"Unlucky in having a false friend and a bitter enemy, though an open one."

"I do not understand," Montgomery said, slowly; but as he spoke, back to his mind came the thought of the words of the White Witch.

"A few words will explain. Do not ask me how I came into possession of the knowledge, because I am not at liberty to answer you. All these misfortunes that have come upon you can be traced to the agency of two men who have not hesitated to stoop to crime to accomplish their objects."

"But those two men?"

"Tulip Roche and Herman Stoll," O'Connel replied.

"But—pardon the doubt—how can I be sure that this information is true?" asked Montgomery.

"Charge Tulip Roche with it, boldly, or better still, ask Frances Chauncy if it was not Tulip Roche who told her that you were engaged to be married to Miss Leone, when you had scarcely known her two hours. She will tell you the truth."

For the first time Montgomery guessed the cause that had separated Frances and himself. A veil seemed torn away from his eyes.

Then a painful suspicion entered his mind.

"Mr. O'Connel, answer one question, please. Has—has Miss Leone any knowledge of the acts of these two men?"

"No."

Montgomery's heart leaped for joy.

"I felt it my duty to tell you what I knew of the affair. Now, you can act your own pleasure," and O'Connel departed.

Montgomery remained; he was waiting for the Englishman.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE TRIUMPH OF THE LEAGUE.

MONTGOMERY did not have long to wait, for in a few moments after O'Connel's departure, he was again tapped on the shoulder. He turned and beheld the Englishman, Pipgan.

"I've kept you waiting for a little while, but couldn't help it," Pipgan said, a self-satisfied look on his shrewd face.

"But where the deuce did you come from?"

"From the hotel. I've taken up my quarters here." Pipgan had again assumed the dress and manners of the "swell."

"You have?"

"Yes, of course; so as to keep my eyes upon my birds."

"Well, what success?" Montgomery asked, eagerly; "have you discovered any thing?"

"More than that; I've discovered every thing."

"You have?"

"Yes, and to-night I think we can end the affair."

"Tell me what you have discovered!"

"Not now; to-night you shall know every thing. Let me work the case up in my own way," said the Englishman. "I am sure that you will be satisfied with what I have done."

"To-night then I shall know all?"

"Yes; and now, Mr. Montgomery, I want you to assist me a little."

"Certainly," Montgomery replied; "what is it?"

"I'm obliged to go down to my old stopping-place, 'The Grapes.' I expect a cable dispatch. I should like to have you remain here and notice if O'Connel returns before I do."

"All right; I will."

"I shan't be gone long. Make your mind easy; to-night will straighten out this tangled skein," and Pipgan departed.

Montgomery remained on the watch. We will now follow O'Connel down the street.

The face of the chief of the League of Three was flushed with triumph. The goal was in sight; the consummation of all his desires was near at hand.

Just before reaching the Fifth Avenue Hotel he met Tulip Roche and Herman Stoll, arm in arm.

O'Connel stopped and greeted them.

"What news?" asked Tulip, anxiously, and O'Connel noticed that he looked careworn and sad.

"Nothing but good!" answered O'Connel, gayly, "but let us adjourn to some quiet place and talk over our affairs."

"My rooms are near at hand; suppose we go there," suggested Stoll, who was a bachelor and occupied furnished apartments in Twenty-fourth street.

"That will do," said O'Connel.

So the three proceeded at once to the rooms of Stoll.

"Now, in the first place, look at that!" said O'Connel, in a tone of triumph, as he drew a little piece of folded paper from his pocket-book and laid it upon the table, around which the three sat.

"Why, it's a check signed by Angus Montgomery, but it's blank—no amount stated," said Stoll.

"Wait a bit though," O'Connel said.

He seized a pen from the table, and with a careless hand wrote upon the check, then pushed it across the table to Stoll.

"Twenty-eight thousand dollars," Stoll read aloud.

"Exactly. Mr. Angus Montgomery has thirty thousand dollars deposited in the bank on which this check is drawn. To-morrow morning Mr. Montgomery will walk down to that bank, inform the cashier that he has drawn this check, so that the person who presents it will have no difficulty in cashing it. In about an hour afterward, Miss Leone Epernay will present this check, receive twenty-eight thousand dollars, turn the same over to me, and then the purpose of our League is accomplished. Angus Montgomery will be a ruined man."

"But he will still have two thousand left," Stoll said.

"What is that sum to the man who has been worth a hundred thousand?" asked O'Connel, scornfully.

"True, it isn't much; but why not take all?" said Stoll.

"Oh, no," replied O'Connel, with a shake of the head, "we have beaten him to the earth; let us not strike him now that he is helpless."

"Well, just as you say," Stoll grumbled; "but if I had my way he'd get but little mercy."

"Build a bridge of silver for a flying enemy," said O'Connel, sagely. "Don't drive this man to desperation, else the act may recoil upon our own heads."

"O'Connel speaks wisely," Tulip observed. It was the first time that he had spoken. There seemed to be a settled melancholy weighing upon his spirits.

"And now, gentlemen, I believe that the League of Three has accomplished what it was created for. To-morrow Angus Montgomery will be a ruined man; to-morrow, then, the League will end."

"Yes," said Stoll. Tulip was silent.

"Do you not assent, Tulip?" O'Connel asked.

"Yes, of course; I was not heeding what you said," replied Tulip, recovering from his abstraction.

"We have achieved all that we set out to do. You, Stoll, have recovered your money. Frances Chauncy has been returned to you, Tulip, and as for myself, the downfall of this man has given me all the revenge that I cared for." And as O'Connel spoke, though his manner was careless and full of triumph, yet he watched the face of Tulip Roche narrowly.

Tulip winced when he heard the name of the blonde beauty.

O'Connel's watchful eyes saw the movement, and a peculiar smile hovered for a moment around his lips. He guessed the reason why Tulip's face clouded at Frances' name.

"You are wrong in one thing, O'Connel," Tulip said, slowly, and in a gloomy way. "The League may have been successful in carrying out the wishes of yourself and Stoll, here; but it has not given Frances Chauncy to me."

"No?" said O'Connel, in a tone of wonder.

Stoll looked astonished.

"No," repeated Tulip.

"But the *ruse* was successful by means of which we separate Montgomery and his pretty woman?" O'Connel said.

"True, and I had reason to believe that I would once again hold my former place in her favor," Tulip replied.

"What makes you think that you can not do so?"

"By some means she has learned that I spoke falsely in regard to Montgomery's engagement with this French girl. When I called at her house this afternoon, the servant said that Miss Frances was out, and put a note into my hand which he said she had directed him to give me. The note informed me that she knew the ungentlemanly device that I had used, and further said that she knew of no word to fully express the contempt with which my conduct had inspired her."

"Good-by then to your hope of winning her!" exclaimed Stoll, coarsely.

"She must have seen Montgomery and had an explanation with him," O'Connel said, thoughtfully.

"Yes, it is possible," Tulip replied.

"I am sorry, but I am sure that you will own that the League has done its best to aid you."

"Yes, I have no complaints to make," Tulip replied.

"Night is coming on," Stoll said, rising.

"Say that we meet here at twelve to-morrow; by that time our final blow will be struck, and the League need exist no longer," O'Connel suggested, rising as he spoke.

"That is satisfactory," Tulip said.

"Where are you bound now, O'Connel?" Stoll asked.

"To get a dinner somewhere; I've been so busy that I have not had any thing to eat since morning," replied O'Connel.

"And this evening?"

"I shall visit Miss Leone."

"Ah! well, that's pleasant!" Stoll observed.

"Yes, but my visit has more to do with business than with pleasure," said O'Connel. "I instructed Miss Leone to make

Montgomery fall in love with her. I will do her the justice to say, that she has faithfully carried out my instructions, but she has also been foolish enough to fall in love with him."

"Now, it is just possible that this love may urge her to do some very foolish action. Now I do not wish my schemes to be set at naught by the mad act of a love-sick girl; therefore I am going to keep my eyes upon Miss Leone until the money for this check is in my hands, then—why she may do what she likes."

Tulip and Stoll exchanged glances. They could not understand the mysterious tie that bound O'Connel and Leone together. The conference broke up. The League of Three was near its end.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

HUNTED DOWN.

O'CONNEL and Leone were together in the apartment of the latter. O'Connel was stretched out carelessly upon the sofa, Leone kneeling by his side. The gas—for it was night—cast a brilliant light upon the tableau.

The face of the girl was deadly pale. Strange blue circles were under the large dark eyes that blazed with a lurid light.

Leone had been imploring—striving with anxious words and tear-wet eyes to move the stony heart of O'Connel.

"Oh, Lionel, will you not have mercy?" she cried, in tones trembling with emotion.

O'Connel looked at the trembling girl with a chilling sneer.

"Don't waste time in foolish supplications," he said, in icy tones. "You ought to know me well enough to be certain that words alone will not swerve me from any purpose that I have resolved to carry out."

"You will not spare Montgomery, then?" she cried, rising as she spoke, a strange look upon her white features.

"No, he is doomed. Three powerful enemies have dragged him down."

"The League of Three, and you are the chief of the league! the other two are Tulip Roche and Herman Stoll, the instruments that have done your will!"

"Exactly," said O'Connel, coolly. "Your wits are shrewder than I thought for. You have guessed rightly regarding the League. We three have crushed Montgomery in the dust."

"Lionel, you are a demon! What has this man ever done to you that you should hate him?" cried Leone, in despair.

"Won the love of the woman that I had marked as mine! I swore that I would be even with him for it, and I've kept my word. Before a year is over, Frances Chauncy will be my wife."

A key turning quickly in a door-lock startled both O'Connel and Leone. The door opened, and the Englishman, Pipgan, followed by Montgomery, entered the room. O'Connel started to his feet, in astonishment.

Quick as a cat, Pipgan sprung upon the young man, hurled him over, backward, on the sofa, and dextrously drew O'Connel's pistol from the revolver-pocket behind. Then he released him and quietly retreated from him.

"Loaded—a seven-shooter, eh?" said Pipgan, as he examined the pistol. "I had an idea that you carried something of this sort, and I didn't know but that some wild idea might come into your head to use it when you found yourself cornered. I beg your pardon, Miss, for making a disturbance in your room," and Pipgan bowed politely to Leone, who stood, wonder-struck at the scene.

With a great effort, O'Connel recovered his composure. He rose to his feet and surveyed the Englishman, calmly.

"What do you mean by this outrage?" he asked.

"Oh, that game won't work," said Pipgan, with a grimace. "I've been occupying that room yonder for some time, and by means of the key-hole I've heard about all that's been said here. Besides, you know well enough who I am. You recognized me the other night when I was got up as the 'swell.' I knew you the moment I put eyes upon you, though you have bleached your black hair to a yellow tint, Mr. *Lionel Derwent*."

O'Connel—as we shall continue to call him—bit his lips until the red blood crimsoned the white teeth.

"So I'm hunted down, eh?" he said, with a bitter laugh.

"Ex-actly," said Pipgan, laconically.

"You are right; I did recognize you, Mr. Christopher Pipgan, but, like a fool, I thought it was only a resemblance. I did not expect to find the celebrated detective so far from Bow street. Did you come clear across the water after me?"

"Bless you, no!" replied the detective officer, for the little Englishman was indeed a detective, renowned as one of the best in all England. "I came over for my own amusement, just to see the country, but, in some way I got tangled up in your affair, and this is the end of it. *You're wanted.*"

"I suppose I understand; still I put the question: what for?"

"For the murder of Captain Ernest Malper," replied Pipgan, in a dry, business-like tone.

Montgomery started in horror.

O'Connel noticed the start and laughed, carelessly. Then he turned to the detective. "Don't you want her, too?" and he pointed to Leone.

Pipgan did not answer.

"Oh, that's the game, is it?" O'Connel said, bitterly. "Good, I'll block it. Leone, I understand! you have betrayed me."

"No, no!" cried the girl, quickly.

"Oh, I see it all! This gentleman is to take me across the water and leave you to him," and he pointed to Montgomery.

"No doubt, he's paid well for it. Now, I'll play my cards. Captain Malper was shot one evening in a lone country house near Liverpool. Two persons alone were present; that woman and myself. Now, listen, officer; I accuse that woman of the murder of Ernest Malper! I was her accomplice in the deed. I turn Queen's evidence and denounce her. Now, refuse to arrest her if you dare!"

Leone sunk, almost fainting, into a chair. Montgomery staggered back. A sullen smile of joy was on O'Connell's face. The detective was the only one of the four that showed no trace of emotion.

"You're game as a pebble, but it won't work," said Pipgan, dryly. "Unluckily for your accusation, Captain Malper made a death-bed statement denouncing you as his murderer, and declaring the woman was innocent."

With a cry of joy, Montgomery rushed to Leone, and folded the half-fainting girl to his heart.

"My dice were loaded, but you're too much for me. Well, where's the bracelets for my wrists?" said O'Connell, with a contemptuous smile.

"Don't be in a hurry; I think that this little matter can be arranged!" said Pipgan, quietly.

O'Connell caught at the hope eagerly.

"How?" he said.

"This little affair is a secret to us here; I haven't hunted you down on behalf of the English Government, but for this gentleman, Mr. Montgomery."

"I understand. What are the conditions?"

"First, that check; second, a full confession of this League of three business; one that we can use against your accomplices; next, all the money that you have obtained by plundering this gentleman."

"I accept; and you will release me?"

"Yes."

"I'll write the confession at once."

O'Connell sat down to the table and commenced writing. Pipgan leaned over him.

"Leone," whispered Montgomery, to the girl as he held her tightly to his breast, "what is the secret that binds you to this man?"

"Can you not guess?" asked the girl. "He is my brother. I swore to my mother on her death-bed that I would never forsake him—she knew his terrible nature well—but that I would cling to and try to save him from the consequences of his evil acts."

"And this crime—the motive?"

"This Captain Malper was in love with me; came to the house when Lionel was away, though I begged of him not to persecute me with a love that was distasteful. One night he and Lionel met; a quarrel followed, ended by the deed of blood." Shuddering, Leone hid her face on Montgomery's breast. Pure as gold from the fire was Leone's heart. Montgomery felt that he had won a treasure.

"There, that covers it," said O'Connell, signing. "Here is the note." He laid it on the table; then, from a secret pocket in his vest, he took a number of checks. "And here's the money that belongs to him. Now, I'll throw something into the bargain. Leone," and he turned to the girl, "I give you back your promise; henceforth your path in life separates from mine; you are free!"

The detective quietly gathered up the valuables.

"You're a sharp fellow," he said, addressing O'Connell.

"My wit has saved my neck this time!" replied O'Connell.

"Just look at this!" And with a smile, Pipgan handed a telegram to O'Connell. He took it with a look of wonder.

"No case. Captain Malper recovered," the telegram read.

O'Connell stared at it in rage. It was dated at London; a cable dispatch!

"What the deuce does this mean?" he asked.

"Plain as the nose on your face. Malper, the man you shot, didn't die. You thought you had killed him and fled to

this country. When I saw you and your sister here, I remembered something about the murder—for everybody thought it was a murder—and then I had met both of you in Liverpool long ago, when you were on the turf. That's how I came to know you. I thought, like the rest who read about the affair in the newspapers, that Malper was dead, of course killed by you. I telegraphed, per cable, for instructions and that's the answer. You're 'done,' my boy. I had no right to arrest you, so I come a bit of strategy over you. I've got what I wanted."

O'Connell looked at the detective for a moment and ground his teeth in anger, then he spoke:

"Will you give me my revolver, please?"

"Certainly," said Pipgan, politely, and he handed it to him.

Quick as thought O'Connell cocked it, leveled the pistol full at the breast of the detective and pulled the trigger.

Down came the hammer—but no report followed.

The detective had not even winked.

He opened his hand and showed the cartridges.

"I took 'em out while you were writing, my boy. I intended to give you back the plaything, and I had an idea that you might do something foolish; 'done' again!"

With an oath O'Connell flung the useless revolver at the smiling face of Pipgan and rushed from the room. Luckily for the detective, he guessed the action and dodged the missile.

Lionel O'Connell was never seen again in New York.

"Pipgan, you have saved me!" cried Montgomery.

"No, the White Witch," the detective replied.

"You know who she is?" asked the young man, eagerly.

"You're a-holding of her in your arms, now!"

Leone blushed crimson.

"It's no use to deny it. I know you by the ring on your finger. I saw it in the car, the other night!" Pipgan cried.

"I will not deny the truth," Leone said. "I am the White Witch. Lionel, my brother, talks in his sleep; he has been accustomed to lie down in my room nearly every afternoon. From him, in his slumber, I heard all the particulars of the plot against you, long before he attempted to carry it out. I tried to save you as the White Witch, even while I was leading you to ruin as Leone. Can you forgive me?" she asked, timidly.

"Yes, and bless you for your love," Montgomery replied.

Little more remains to be told.

Herman Stoll and Tulip Roche were "interviewed" by the shrewd detective. The result of which was, that Montgomery received quite a handsome sum of money, and the two conspirators found it convenient to leave New York for a European tour.

Frances Chauncy is still Frances Chauncy, a living wonder of fickle beauties.

Among all Montgomery's old friends none were more rejoiced to see him restored to wealth than the dark-eyed Agatha.

Montgomery and Leone were married and are happy.

Pipgan returned to England; he likes America, but says they don't have any hale here.

In the mines of Mortana is a noted gambler with streaked hair, black and yellow. He is called Jim York. Few would recognize in the cool, reckless desperado, the polished Lionel O'Connell.

He has played a desperate game—lost, and has left civilization forever.

In drink and play, he finds the opiate that dulls remembrance.

His fate is easily predicted.

A drunken brawl—revolvers and howie-knives in active play, and then? A grave in some lonely gulch, whose sands show traces of the precious metal that he played so recklessly, and yet so coolly, to win.

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